CRITICS CHOICE FILES MAGAZINE SPOTLIGHT

Swamp Thing

BY MARTIN CANNON

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EDITED BY HAL SCHUSTER

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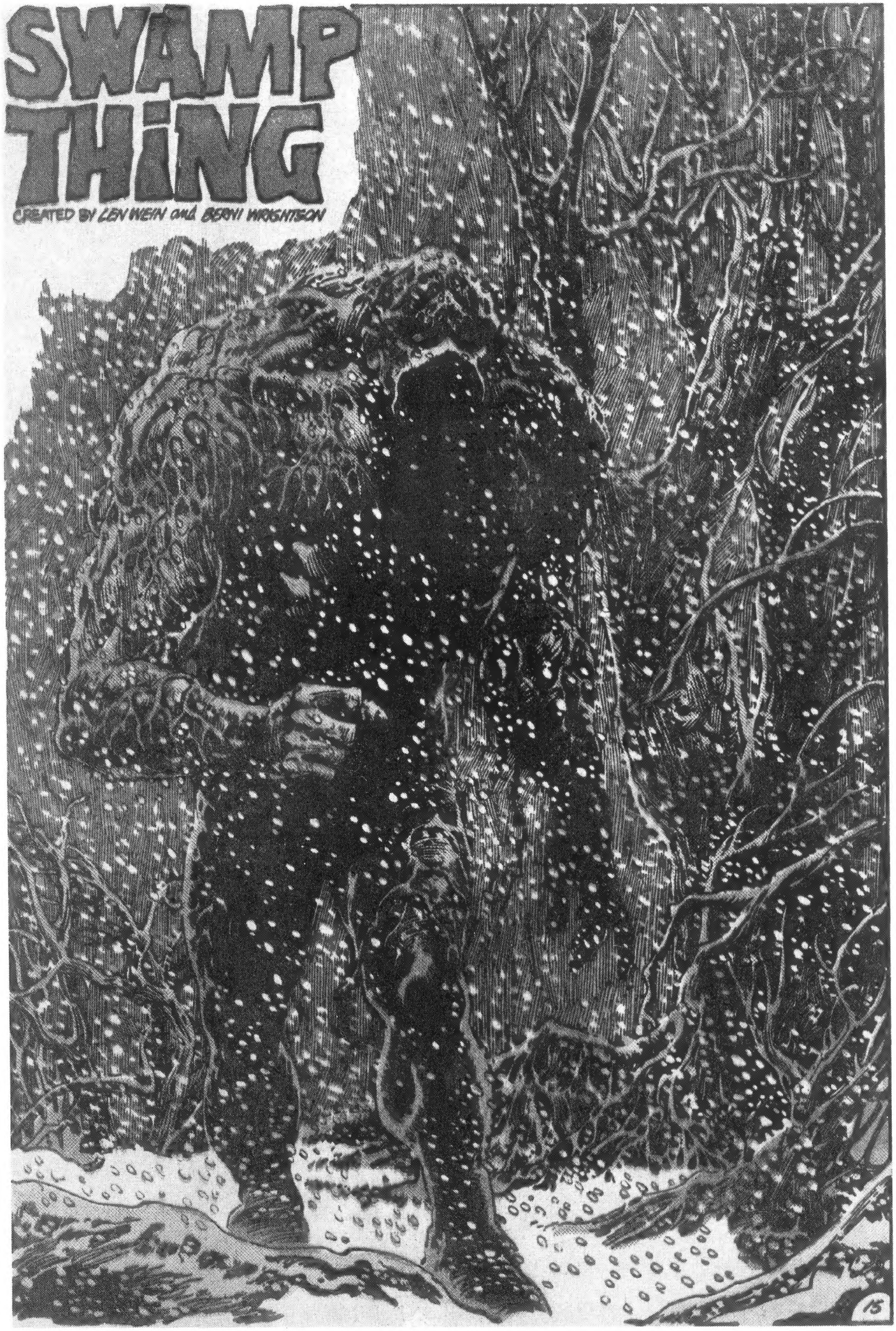
Dedicated to Karen...


SWAMP THING
CREATED BY LEN WEIN and BERNI WRIGHTSON

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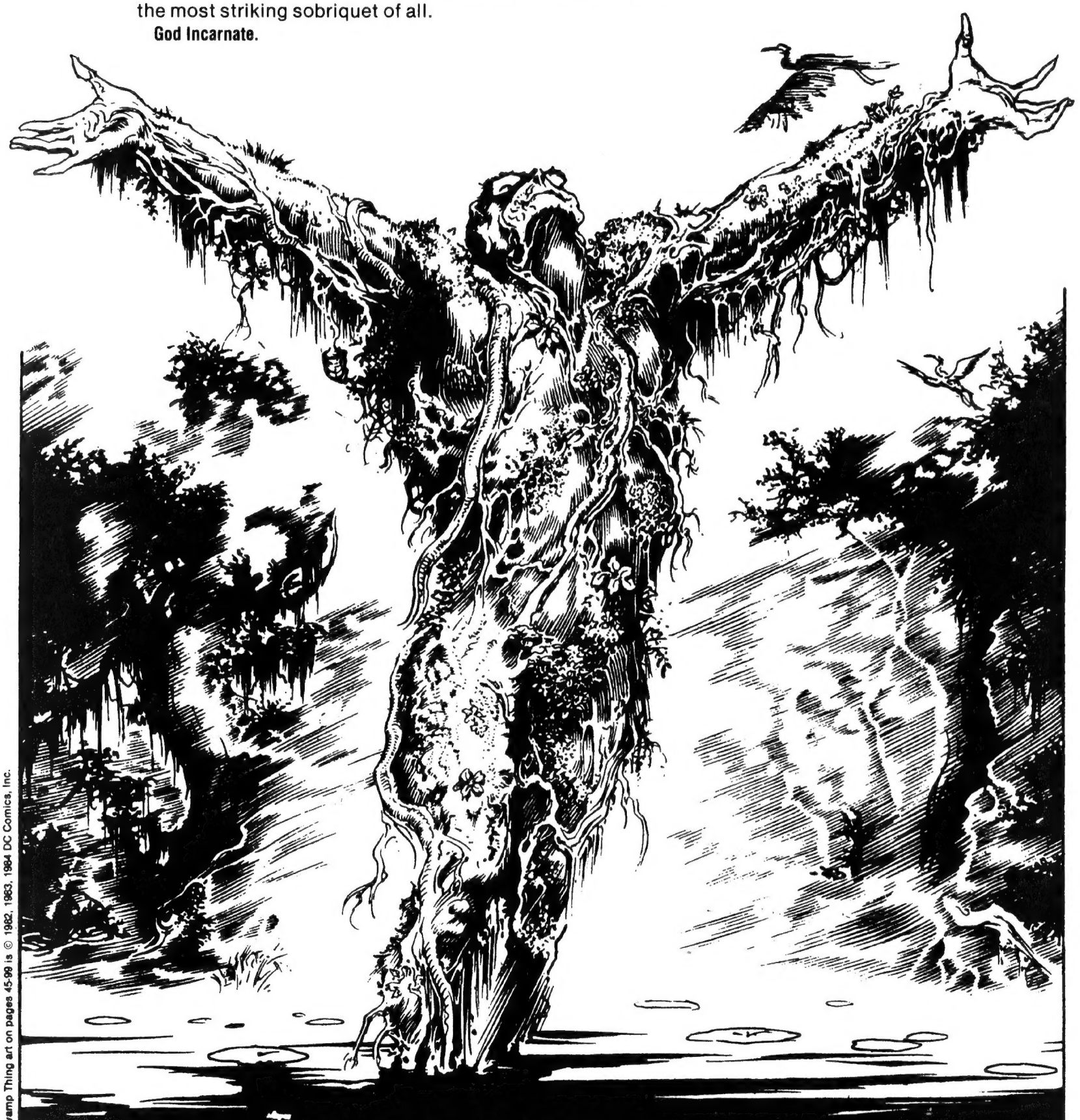
Introduction

For some twenty years now, comic book enthusiasts have maintained the jolly tradition of handing out colorful nicknames to artists and writers. Stan Lee is "The Man." Jack Kirby is "The King." Gil Kane was once "Sugar-Lips," though I think he's prefer us all to forget that. Jim Shooter has been called, oh gosh, all **sorts** of things. But Alan Moore, the British writer of **Swamp Thing**, **Miracleman**, **Watchmen** and much else, has, on more than one occasion, received the most striking sobriquet of all.

God Incarnate.



Swamp Thing art on pages 45-98 is © 1982, 1983, 1984 DC Comics, Inc.

CHARACTER-SHEET for 'SAGA of SWAMP THING' SAMPLE PAGES —
PENCILLED by JOHN TOTLEBEN after INKED by JOHN TOTLEBEN
OUTSIZED, AMPHIBIOUS MUTANT— FLIMSY SKELETAL STRUCTURE BUT POSSESSES UNCANNY ABILITY TO HEAL ANY WOUNDS BY GROWING NEW & ACTIVE EXTREMITIES & LIMBS FROM ANY BASE WOUNDS, LIKE LEGENDARY HYDRA

No other comics writer has been so acclaimed, or has made such a mark on the medium. One could point to Frank Miller, Will Eisner, Jack Kirby, Howard Chaykin, and damn few others, and say that they have had a similar effect on comics, but each of those creators made his reputation, first and foremost, by holding a drawing pencil. Alan Moore may be the first person (excepting, perhaps, Stever Gerber) to affect the industry soley through the power of the word.

As Harvey Pekar likes to say, comics are words 'n' pictures, and you can do anything with words 'n' pictures — but in the beginning is the word, though comics fans, in their zeal for things visual and their discomfort with matters literary, often ignore this fact. We quibble endlessly over the art in comic books, foolishly inflating the importance of subtle distinctions in quality and style — and why? The art's fine. Really. Take a university-level class in the history of drawing, and you'll study lots of ancient, venerable pictures not much better than something Neal Adams could turn out. Does Bisette have to outdo Boticelli before comics start garnering respect? No. Only by improving the words on the page, as Moore has done, can we hope to redeem this most despised and rejected of media from its present low status. We should therefore be grateful for his lead, and that other comics scripters now try to follow it.

MOst notably, Moore has wrought his wonders with miraculous speed. He was only 30 (or thereabouts) when he began to teach American readers how comics should be written. His ministry, at this writing, has lasted just three years.

Cripes, he even **looks** like Jesus.

I'm not sure whether Moore smiles or winces at the extravagant flattery he receives. He's a modest man, by all accounts, and he may also have heard of the old Yiddish proverb "If God were living on Earth, men would break his windows," an axiom designed to give any avatar pause. I've no desire to break Moore's windows, or to play his Pilate. But I am here, by virtue of no authority whatsoever, to act as his judge.

I can hear the question forming on your lips, the question all critics hear too often: "Who are **you** to...?" My answer (and the answer of all other critics with any sense of proportion) is, of course, "Nobody; just a fellow who has inveigled a publisher to spill some ink. Whether he spills wisely or foolishly is your decision." I am, in short, a critic. Which is to say, a leech.

Yet the critic, like the leech, serves his purpose in the ecosystem. As Pauline Kael once noted, the critic provides the ónly **objective** commentary; the rest is advertising. Please note, however, that the word "objective" refers to the fact that the critic draws no material benefit from the success or failure of the work in question; don't assume, as many a ninny does, that "objectivity" requires the critic to air your views as well as his own. I'll never understand why people get so flushed and furious when they chance upon a strongly-expressed dissenting sentiment. You already **know** what your feelings are, so why do you insist in seeing them on the page? The critic exists to challenge. Through the clash of his prejudice and yours, you may arrive at genuine thought. "But," you ask, "this is all a matter of opinion; isn't one person's "opinion as good as another's?" Sorry, but **no**. When I was quite young, I liked Tchaikovsky above all other composers; I now much prefer Mahler; I may one day learn to love Schoenberg. Some opinion is immature. Taste evolves. And this evolution would never take place were it not for the natural selection the critic helps to provide.

I tell you all this to prepare you. This volume and the next will provide a thorough criticism — not mere synopses, not an exercise in idolatry, not a "glimpse behind the scenes" — of Alan Moore's work on **Swamp Thing**. And (please, no letterbombs; you'll only injure one of my publisher's flunkies) I refuse to see him as God Incarnate. Analysis and worship do not mix.

Keep in mind that though I am a heretic, I'm not stupid. These pages contain some discordant notes about Moore's work, notes which apparently, nobody else cares to hit or hear, but don't get the idea that I can't recognize his virtues. He may well be the best writer in the industry. Not only that. "The industry" is a small world, with small standards. Moore, I feel, deserves to be judged by the standards used in a much wider literary world. "I don't consider myself a very good writer" he once said in an interview. "Maybe I write pretty good comics, but in the broad arena I wouldn't be anything special." Perhaps; perhaps not. Anthony Burgess recently came out with a short book listing his choices for the 99 best novels of the past half-century, and at least a couple of the works he singles out (**Goldfinger** for one, **Ancient Evenings** for another) are less impressive than **The Watchmen**. Come to think of it, though I love much of Burgess' work, I'm not sure that I wouldn't prefer **Swamp Thing** to the **A.D.** teleplay on my resume.

So we should pay Alan Moore the compliment of treating him as a **writer**, not as a **comic book** writer. And this strikes me as the perfect forum for doing so. Comics criticism has come into its own in the past few years; the field may have attracted more talented writers than have comics themselves — writers, for instance, such as R. Fiore, an insightful, frequently hilarious reviewer. But he's a columnist, and so are the rest. They pass judgement one issue at a time. Where can one find an in-depth analysis of an entire body of work? A review of **Stagecoach** is nice, but a

book on the western films of John Ford is better. A critique of **The Boating Party** can be valuable, but a volume on Renoir can be more valuable still. If we're going to operate under the presumption that comics can be just as good as any other means of experession, then we've got to examine them with the same sorts of tools we use for novels, films, paintings, symphonies, and so on. One way to start is to pick up a good, healthy handful of comic books in a series, and simply look at them — really **look** at them. Which is just what these two volumes, and (should they prove successful) their successor volumes, intend to do — though, I'll admit, there aren't that many comic book "runs" that bear up under close scrutiny as well as Alan Moore's **Swamp Thing.**

Oops. I may have just said a dirty word.

"It annoys me," quoth Moore, "when people talk about 'Alan Moore's **V for Vendetta**' or 'Alan Moore's **Miracleman**,' and I'm not going to enjoy hearing about 'Alan Moore's **Swamp Thing**'." I understand. He doesn't want to slight his co-workers. But "Alan Moore's **Swamp Thing**" certainly scans a lot better than "Alan Moore's and Stephen Bissette's and John Totleben's and Rick Veitch's and Alfredo Alcala's and Stan Woch's and Ron Randall's and Dan Day's and Shawn McManus' **Samp Thing.**" These artists have all done terrific work; no comic book has ever gone through so many different pencil-and-pen-pushers and maintained such a consistently high quality. True, in the following pages you won't find nearly so much comment about the drawing as about the writing, but that's because words about words come fairly easily, and words about visuals don't. Drawing starts where verbiages stops, which is why we see so many good book reviewers and so few worthwhile art critics. (Though there's still no excuse for the fact that most "fine art" magazines feature "reviews" that read like catalogue descriptions for a department store.)

At any rate, we will on occasion, mostly for the sake of brevity, refer to "Alan Moore's **Swamp Thing.**" His writing links all the issues under discussion.

Ah, but have we narrowed our discussion unnecessarily? There was a Swamp Thing before Moore; there may be one after him. What about Len Wein and Berni Wrightson, who invented the character? What about Martin Pasko and David Micheline and Nestor Redondo and Tom Yeates and all the others?

Call me arbitrary, but I think it's better not to deal with the entire series in any great detail. "Hero histories" are pretty common in comics-oriented magazines, and they rarely do more than evoke nostalgia, since their primary purpose is to assure the reader that, yes, he wasn't the only person who read all those issues. We need a sharper focus. Let's concentrate on creators, not characters.

And yet: Moore didn't originate the Swamp Thing. (In fact, he's created rather few comics characters from scratch. **Miracleman** was a 1950s series and **Watchmen** can be interpreted as a free re-working of Charlton's characters. Maybe Moore's fiction is like yoghurt — he needs a bit of starter to get his own batch going. Of course, much the same thing can be said of Shakespeare.) We need to understand something of what came before to understand what Moore did with it — and besides, too many people remember the original **Swamp Thing** fondly for us to treat those issues, especially the first ten, in cavalier fashion. So in the first part of this overview, I'll spend a few pages on the Wein/Wrightson collaboration, and in the next book, I'll talk a bit about what came after. We'll also mention the enjoyably execrable **Swamp Thing** movie, which revived the character after an eight-year nap.

And no, on to (forgive me, God Incarnate) Alan Moore's **Swamp Thing.**

HE'S OPENING HIS EYES.
19

Roots of the Swamp Thing

This chapter's title comes from the excellent reprint series that DC offered in 1986, which, in my opinion, is the edition of choice for those who haven't yet read the original Wein/Wrightson **Swamp Thing** stories. Collectors will probably insist on obtaining the original run, from 1972-1974; personally, I've never understood the collector mentality, and I'm pretty much blind to the attraction of cheap paper, bad printing and silly ads. Get the reprints.

Everyone who read comics back in the early '70s remembers these stories fondly. Well, not **everyone**, exactly. I didn't care for them at the time. Alas, I was infected with a misplaced snobbery favoring the works of a competing comic book company (the AMA should recognize Marvelitis as a significant early-adolescence disease, like mononucleosis, syphilis and valspeak), and I particularly enjoyed a series called **Man-thing**, written by Steve Gerber. In those days, devotees of one "Thing" tended to view the other as an upstart copycat, though comic book historians, after much diligent and scholarly reserach, have now determined that **Swamp Thing** and **Man-Thing** arose more-or-less simultaneously. No cribbing involved.

Though I refused to become a **Swamp Thing** patron, I immediately understood one aspect of the book's appeal. Berni Wrightson's artwork looked like nothing else on the market. Wrightson had only recently been graduated from doing short stories for the anthology magazines, **House of Mystery** and **House of Secrets**. In fact, the "Swamp Thing" character had its origins in one of these short pieces,

which appeared in HOS 92. Fans responded to this tale quite favorably, and so Wrightson got his first major gig. He lasted 10 issues.

He had to leave, despite much wailing from the readers, because he really wasn't a comic book artist. Oh, he had all the requisite skills, and then some, but comics require a certain pace, a certain patience, and certain work habits. And, as one can easily judge from Wrightson's own statements in interviews, he wasn't that sort of pencil-pusher. So he left ST. Many considered this departure tantamount to tearing a major organ out of the character, who soon died on the table. Wrightson has since contented himself with a number of other projects, of the sort that don't demand a rigorous schedule, and his work has continued to grow. His illustrations for Mary Shelley's **Frankenstein** made that edition the first choice for anyone's library (try to ignore Stephen King's hastily composed preface), and his Spider-man graphic novel proves that he's still as fine a visual storyteller as anybody else.

Indeed, Wrightson has become such a good illustrator that the earlier work — the Swamp Thing stories —now suffers by comparison. Similarly, anyone used to the elaborate inking styles which John Totleben and Alfredo Alcala lavish on the series nowadays may have some trouble adjusting to the fluid brushstrokes and heavy shadows which dominate the original stories. Both Wrightson's **Frankenstein** and Totleben's careful crow-quillery show the influence of the great 19th Century illustrators; you feel this influence much less when looking at the first ten issues of **Swamp Thing**. The 1800's are **there**, to be sure, but they haven't yet taken over the artwork.

Other influences dominate those issues. Alan Moore sees Graham Ingels and Jack Davis; I see Will Eisner, and maybe a little Wally Wood. The Wood's in the background details — the long shots of villages, the laboratory equipment, and other whatnot. You can see the Eisner touch everywhere else—in the faces, the postures, the expressive line work, and, most of all, in the shadows, which blanket the figures and mask the features.

From the earliest, Wrightson was quite bold in his use of silhouette; he never looked like he was cheating, as did other artists of the time. I think Wrightson (like Eisner) succeeded because he used light and shade to define form, to separate the surface planes of a figure or object. He may, in this regard, even have something to teach the present ST artists (though believe me, Bissette, Totleben and co. have no more enthusiastic fan than I), whose careful hatchings sometimes work against the illusion of solidity.

Though **The Spirit** haunts Wrightson's **Swamp Thing**, I couldn't spot this influence at the time. In 1972, like many young comics fans, I didn't know Eisner's work. Nearly 15 years later, we all know, or should know, Eisner backwards and forwards, just we have assimilated the work of Wrightson, Mike Ploog (who drew that other "-thing" book for awhile) and other talented artists who saw that the master still had important lessons to teach. It's hard to remember the days when those lessons were ignored or forgotten, when comic book art consisted mostly of bright, flat figures with thick outlines — i.e., when it was Lichtenstein stuff; the printers demanded that sort of work (it made the color-cutter's job easier), but fans got bored with such art pretty rapidly. Against this background, Wrightson's work had an influence which today's younger comics enthusiasts may not be able to understand. He never bored; this art may have borrowed from the past, but it also represented something very new, and it set a standard. It remains an example of fine comics storytelling.

As for the stories...

Well, as I said, I liked **Man-thing**. I liked Gerber's whacked-out imagination, and I still fondly recall some of the more outlandish concepts that popped up in those pages — e.g., the dead clown whose ghost forced the main characters to act out the story of his dead past, the Foolkiller (whose calling card read "Today is the last day of the rest of your life"), a barbarian jumping out of a jar of peanut butter, and, of course, Howard the Duck. This stuff resembled nothing I had ever seen before.

Those first ten issues of **Swamp Thing**, by comparison (and comparison was inevitable), gave us familiar material — familiar from the Universal horror films of the '30s and '40s. Mad scientists, werewolves, walking dead, witches, Frankensteinian creations, Transylvanian settings — these things **were** horror back then, or rather, they represented horror to artists and writers who grew up on such fare as dispensed by Hollywood. And **Swamp Thing** was to be a horror strip. So Len Wein did the expected thing, and trotted out the bats and the wolfmen and the decaying castles and the hordes of villagers carrying pitchforks and torches. As Stephen King has said (and as Alan Moore has repeated), the reality set has changed since then.

Actually, I don't know if I buy the King excuse. To be frank, I think **Swamp Thing** waxed fairly hokey even by 1972 standards.I was pretty young then, little more than a refugee from tyke-dom, yet those creaky old Universal flicks had long since failed to scare, or even interest, me. Undoubtedly, most other youngsters of the day also found that those films induced more yawns than shivers. So why did everyone take so readily to the same elements when they were presented in **Swamp Thing**?

Because **Swamp Thing** was comics. And in comics, vampires and werewolves and the like had not yet become old news. They were, in fact, headline items, just then making a return appearance after fifteen years in the dungeons. Which brings us to one little-noted, but important, aspect of the Swamp saga, one well worth a lengthy digression: the Comics Code Authority.

Remember the Code?

Get out your magnifying glass and examine some recent comic book covers and just maybe you'll find it. Though not, peculiarly enough, on **Swamp Thing**, which has unrestrainedly polluted the values of our nation's youth since November, 1984. Nobody cares much about the Code these days (though if the fundamentalist anti-comics tirade continues to gain momentum, you can just bet that industry cowards will flee back to the censor's protection as quickly as their little yellow feet will carry them). But there one was a time when comics couldn't present the concept of "Interspecies Romances" to every grade-schooler capable of combing a 7-11's comic book racks. There once was a time when the Code loomed large.

And the Code was once very strict. Dr. Wertham's crusade against comics in the 1950s left permanent scars on the industry. (The inquisition of the '50s was conducted by psychiatrists; that of the '80s by religionists. Progress?) To ward off the crusaders, DC and the other major comics publishers committed themselves to a code of ethics which saddled them with some inane restrictions. And the most absurd of all these clauses prohibited any depiction of—you must have guessed it by now—walking dead, werewolves, vampires and the like. Yes. Dracula was indecent. The Mummy was immoral.

Hard to imagine, huh, kiddies? Nowadays, that stuff's considered family fare. Hell, the media have even begun to take a warm and mellow attitude toward Texas chainsaw massacres. But the hard fact was that in 1971 your 15 cents couldn't buy you one measly wolfman. The Code, in its Solon-like wisdom, had decided that any impressionable tot who caught a glimpse of Frankenstein's monster in a comic book would probably go on to read Karl Marx while smoking mary-jew-wanna.

This nonsense couldn't go on forever. In the early '70s, the Code loosened up a bit. Just a bit, mind you, though at the time it seemed like, well, gee, like all *heck* had broken loose. Comics could mention drugs, as long as we heard only discouraging words. Batman could say "Damn!" on occasion. The censors no longer bothered to redraw pictures of overly-voluptuous women. We saw exit wounds. We saw brief glimpses of blood (red, not black). We even saw Conan in bed with a naked girl (well, he wore a loincloth and she had a strategically-placed sheet, but jeez, in 1972 this was *seeing* stuff!). And we saw monsters.

The early '70s was the era of monsters.

Marvel alone gave us **Werewolf by Night**, **Morbius**, **Frankenstein** and (the very best of the lot) **Tomb of Dracula**—as well as about a dozen others! And readers were desperate for this stuff, for the same reason good Catholic boys were hot to read Zola once they found out he'd been placed on the Index. The forbidden fruit factor. You can't have censorship without it. We ate of the fruit, and ate and ate, until finally we grew bored and spit it out. Marvel no longer publishes any of the above titles.

As for DC, they gave us (see, I haven't forgotten the subject of this exercise) **Swamp Thing**. And Swamp Thing gave us DC's version of the great monster invasion. This comic sold novelties, and when the novelty wore off, what was left?

Well, there was the art. For all of ten issues. We've already dealt with that.

And there were the characters. The modern comic depends on its supporting cast; readers often pay little attention to plot, preferring to concentrate on character interaction. (When Lee and Kirby invented the unending-continued story format in the mid-'60s, they invested comics with soap opera appeal, to a degree most of us don't care to admit.) But I found the ST players unexciting. Lt. Matt Cable, "government investigator," (for which service?) was two-dimensional, and Abigail Arcane, the Bulgarian beauty with the bleached hair, existed mainly to play damsel-in-distress. Nathan Ellery (a.k.a. Mister E) showed signs of becoming an interesting heavy in #7, but he fell off a penthouse balcony at the end of that story. (A wheelchair-bound E returned in issue 17. *That* was stretching things.) Linda Holland had potential, but she died in the first issue. And then there was the dog. Swamp Thing must have been the only monster with a pet dog. Poochie met his maker in issue 7.

So much for the supporting characters. What about the dialogue, the captions? How was Wein as a wordsmith?

He was, in fact, pretty good, when judged by the standards of the era. Remember though, in 1972 comics writers could get away with a few devices that might arch an eyebrow today. For example, in the first issue, Linda Holland says "Hope they remembered to stock the refrigerator...because right now, this little scientist is starving!" Nobody actually talks like that; Wein just wanted to make damn sure we knew that Linda was a scientist. His characters tended to sport outrageous vaudeville accents because he wanted to make sure we knew what country they came from. Matt Cable's acquaintances usually called him "Matt Cable," not "Matt," not "Cable," not "Hey you," because Wein wanted to make sure we remembered the fellow's name. And so on.

In short, like all other comics writers of the day, he insisted on making things "lappy." The writers for the old Milton Berle show originated the term "lappy," which means throwing information in the viewer's lap—making sure he *gets it*. (Remember how people in sit-coms used to say things like "So, you play for Tommy Dorsey, the great jazz bandleader?" Lappiness triumphant!) Lappy writing isn't always a sin. Epic Comics' **Starstruck** series could have stood a little lappiness, for example, and Howard Chaykin desperately needs to take a course in remedial lappification—what the *hell* was going on in that **Time Squared** book, anyways? But until recently, most comics

ladled the lappiness on quite thick indeed, and the results can cause a few pained winces when you dig up the old comics these days.

Why did they do this? Why did Wein (and Lee and Thomas and Broome and Friedrich and all the others) feel so insecure about the readers' ability to *get it*?

Because the readers were kids.

There. I said it. That's the main difference between Wein's Swamp Thing and Moore's. Moreover, that's the difference between "Silver Age" comics and much of the late '80s product. The target audience was younger. The percentage of adults who will read comics is higher now. The percentage of kids who can read *anything* is lower now.

Len Wein, very responsibly, kept his audience in mind when he wrote those stories. And we should keep that audience in mind when we re-read his efforts. We can smile at some of the sillier aspects of those issues, without letting that silliness blind us to some truly poetic touches. I didn't notice these touches in 1972-74, because all I could see were the boring old Universal monster movie cliches, but I can see the subtle, oddly moving moments in Wein's ST now. In much the same way, only an adult can catch the melancholy undercurrents in **Peter Pan**, the satire of feminism in **The Land of Oz**, or the metaphor for sexual awakening in **The Cunning Little Vixen**. Don't smirk at the literature produced for children and adolescents; it can be a hell of a lot more artful than **Miami Vice**.

Moore notes a few of **Swamp Thing**'s artful moments in an essay printed in the reprint series—the creature's crucifixion in issue 2, the simple-minded mute playing with flowers in issue 5, and the town of mechanical people in issue 6. The appeal of these images, as Moore points out, is that they had both a sort of horror and a sort of beauty to them. But there was more.

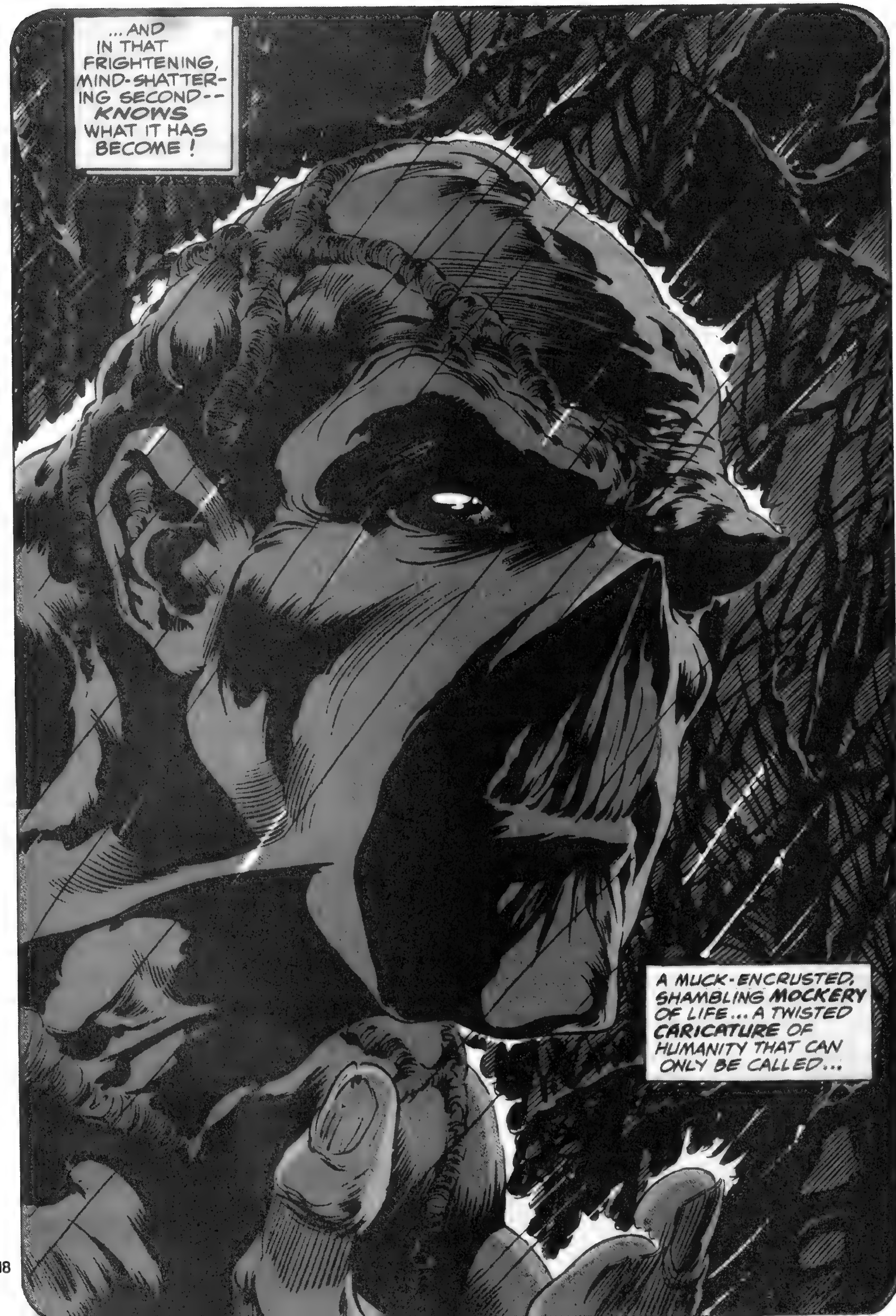
Frank Miller recently won hosannas for his **Dark Knight**; he couldn't have given us that graphic novel if Wein hadn't given us "Night of the Bat" in ST 7. David Lynch's **Blue Velvet** won all sorts of attention for ferreting out the surreal horror beneath a small town's sunny exterior; Wein had already used this very idea, and took it to the Nth degree, in ST 8 Stanislaw Lem gives us the emotions of a man confronted with a similacrum of his dead wife in **Solaris**; Wein gave us exactly the same thing, and to no lesser effect, in ST 6's "A Clockwork Horror."

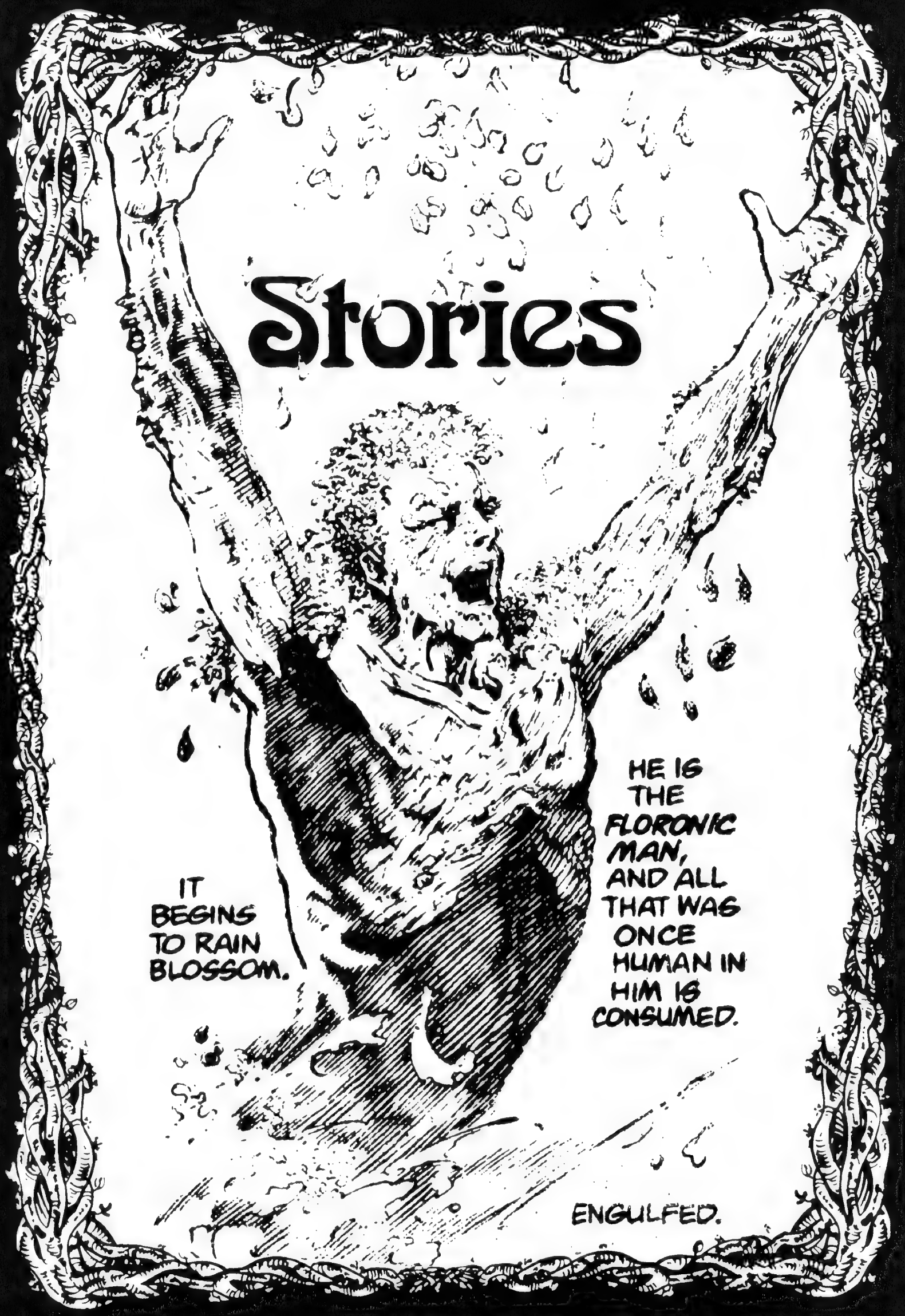
Furthermore, Wein's prose scanned nicely. His pacing always works, and, as Moore says, "there were words and phrases that had been worked at and chosen, rather than merely typed." Few comics could boast of this virtue in 1972. Few can so boast now; modern comics may be written for a somewhat older reader, but that doesn't mean they're written well.

And beyond all that, there was the *idea* of the thing. Commentators like to use the word "myth" a lot when talking about comics, mostly because doing so gives folks with college educations an excuse to indulge in the low and outlandish pleasures of their youth. Sometimes, however, you can't escape the feeling that these gaudy, jump-suited comics characters serve the same purpose for us that the ancient pantheons served for our ancestors. Superman is a modern Zeus; the Flash is a latterday Mercury; Thor is a modern...well, Thor. And the Swamp Thing is our version of the old European nature god, whom we continually sacrifice (Swampy's been "killed" so many times that he now scarcely takes offense at it; see issue 58), yet who eternally resurrects himself. But the interesting thing about Wein's approach was that he kept the creature as childlike as he was godlike. The original version of the character provided a clever metaphor for early adolescence; many teenage readers must have felt like Alex Holland, trapped in a powerful new body, unable to communicate effectively with society at large, and therefore mistrusted and shunned by that society. Swamp Thing as nature god; Swamp Thing as outcast—Wein displayed a genuine insight into his readership when he combined the two. For each new generation sees itself as the Spirit of Renewal, and each new generation is seen as the Monster.

In summation: Wein wrote stories for a younger audience. These stories could get pretty silly at times. They had obvious moments. They tended to wallow in horror show triteness. They had a supporting cast made of wax.

But for all that, they had resonance.


...AND IN THAT FRIGHTENING, MIND-SHATTERING SECOND-- KNOWS WHAT IT HAS BECOME!
A MUCK-ENCRUSTED, SHAMBLING MOCKERY OF LIFE... A TWISTED CARICATURE OF HUMANITY THAT CAN ONLY BE CALLED...


Stories
IT BEGINS TO RAIN BLOSSOM.
HE IS THE FLORONIC MAN, AND ALL THAT WAS ONCE HUMAN IN HIM IS CONSUMED.
ENGULFED.

Issues

The original **Swamp Thing** run lasted 24 issues, from October 1972 to August 1976. After the cancellation of his own magazine, Swampy poked his slimey head into a few other books— **Challengers of the Unknown**, **Brave and the Bold** and **DC Comics Presents**. None of these really warrant your attention. Then director Wes Craven, displaying truly Cimino-esque instincts, decided that Swampy was a hot property, and the magic of Hollywood is such that even a class-F piece of turkey movie-making can revive a worn out comic book character. Swampy got a new book—called **Saga of the Swamp Thing**—to give all his expected film-won fans a place to follow his new adventures. But Swampimania didn't exactly sweep the nation after the film's release, so the book had to survive on its own merits. Martin Pasko wrote the series, and he didn't do so bad a job as many believe, but his labors couldn't keep Swampy alive. Editor Len Wein called England, interrupted Alan Moore's dinner (he was having Lemon-Cheese Pears in Ravigote Sauce, whatever *that* is) and handed him the book.

Let's examine the results of Wein's decision. On the following pages, I give a synopsis of each issue, followed by a critical analysis.

Saga of the Swamp Thing #20
Loose Ends

Writer.....Alan Moore
Pencils.....Dan Day
Inks.....John Totleben
Editor.....Len Wein
Colorist.....Tatjana Wood
Letterer.....John Costanza

Issues

In essence, this is not so much the first Alan Moore story as the last Martin Pasko story; Moore devotes his premiere effort on the strip to throwing finales at the previous writer's various plotlines.

Swamp Thing discovers Arcane's corpse; our hero, apparently ignorant of one of the basic laws of comic books, now feels satisfied that his enemy lies well and truly beyond the pale. Meanwhile, General Sunderland, a big-business bar sinister who has played the heavy for many an issue, notes that the entire cast of the Swamp saga has congregated in one small area, and decides to capitalize upon this rare conjunction—he sends a platoon of soldiers to wipe them all out. Sunderland's men prove surprisingly inept: They miss Liz, Dennis, Matt and Abby. But they do manage to bag the big prize. The last two pages give us some fairly astonishing images of Swamp Thing's bullet-riddled body, which is shipped off to Washington for autopsy.

****

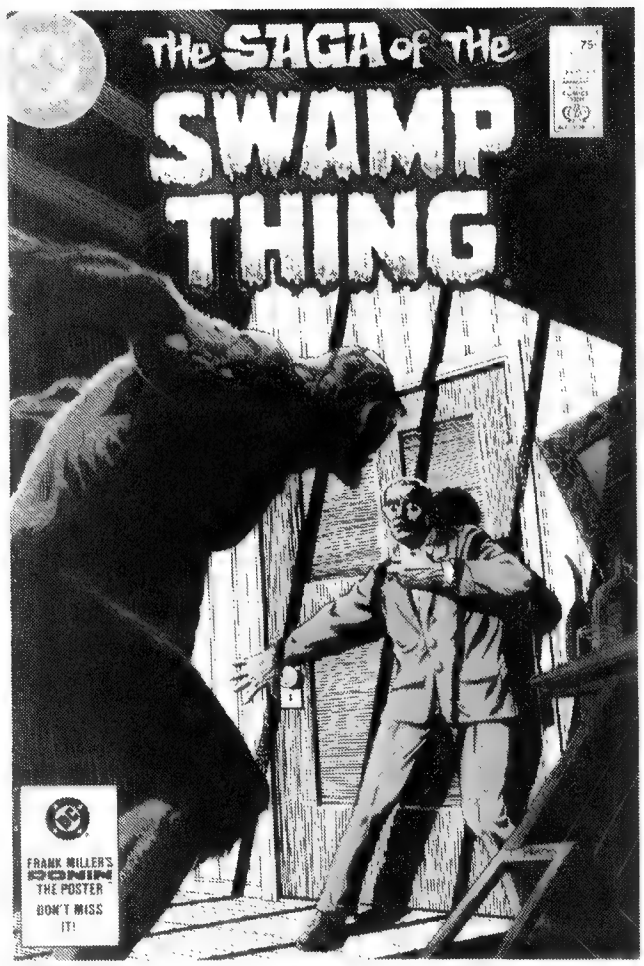
Moore's initial installment is a tad awkward, and, frankly, rather dull. Not his fault, really—he hasn't yet made the character his own; he has to kill off the old Swamp Thing before the new version can take over the strip. One can spot indications throughout that Moore hadn't yet found his voice. The pacing is off, the metaphors bludgeon the reader, and the dialogue doesn't always work when read aloud, which is the acid test of effective comic book speech. (Though the reader should apply this test in a *very* circumspect manner. There are few things more embarassing than being caught reading a comic book aloud.)

Dan Day provides this issue with extremely satisfying artwork. Neither of the Day brothers (the late Gene Day had a quite similar style) has garnered the sort of fan affection they obviously deserve. Day here unifies facing pages by decorating the corners with totemic ornaments, a favorite device of both artists. We don't immediately catch the significance of these emblems; doping out their meaning adds another layer to the story.

Incidentally, this is the last we see of Liz or Dennis for quite awhile; before dispatching with the characters, however, Moore sets up the 180 degree turnabout in their relationship which will provide issue 54 with its main conflict.

The Saga of the Swamp Thing #21
The Anatomy Lesson

Writer.....Alan Moore
Artists.....Stephen Bissette and John Totleben
Editor.....Len Wein
Letterer.....John Costanza
Colorist.....Tatjana Wood



Sunderland has the Swamp Thing's corpse on ice; the mega-capitalist fiend frees Dr. Jason Woodrue from prison to examine the body. Sunderland wants to understand exactly how Alec Holland became the creature; he notes that Linda Holland, though also exposed to the bio-restorative formula, did not turn into a distaff Swamp Thing. The formula doesn't work on human tissue. So why did it work on Holland's?

Woodrue spends weeks dissecting the creature. He is shocked to discover that none of the Thing's organs actually functioned—the creature never really had a heart or a brain or lungs, just odd, unworkable simulacrums of those body parts, formed out of vegetable matter. Mystery within mystery; the creature's origin seems an insoluble matter.

Within six weeks, Woodrue has the answer. He tells Sunderland of a recently-conducted experiment involving planarian worms; scientists taught one worm to run a maze, fed that worm to its fellows, and discovered that the cannibal worms had acquired their educated companion's training. The Swamp Thing was formed by a similar process. Plant life that had been suffused with the formula fed upon Alex Holland's corpse, and gained thereby his knowledge and memories. Those memories included having lungs, legs, hands, teeth and so forth; the plant matter complied with these images and acquired humanoid form. The Swamp Thing is not Alec Holland transformed into something resembling a plant, but a plant transformed into something resembling Holland.

The General, upon receiving this report, brusquely dismisses Woodrue. Back to prison for the good doctor. Ah, but the General doesn't know who he's dealing with. Before leaving, Woodrue adjusts the company's computers, which control every aspect of the building's functions. The Swamp Thing unfreezes.

That night, Sunderland discovers that he shouldn't have overlooked one of the major points in the report: you can't kill a vegetable by shooting it. Swampy, no longer a frozen food, stalks the deserted building, finds the report, finds out the truth about himself, and soon finds the General. Woodrue has sealed the building; no one can enter or escape; Sunderland and the creature are the only two inside. Soon there is only one.

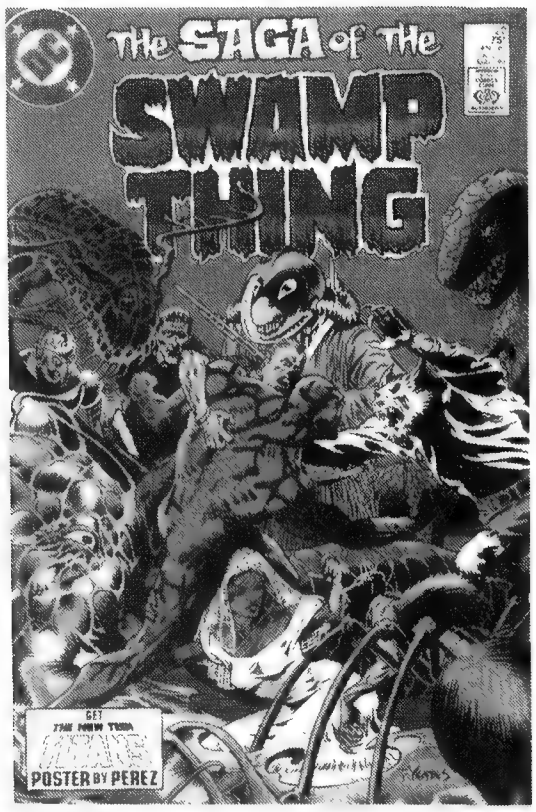
****

Of the ten-or-so early Moore issues that now command gouger's prices at comic shops, this is probably the best and most important; if you missed these books when they came out, and your funds for back issues are limited, invest in ST 21 before picking up any of the others. This story recreates the character entirely. Out goes the old origin and in comes the new; Swampy even tosses away his old body, adopting a mossier, more ragged look. This issue changes the entire direction of the series.

ST 21 also introduces one of Moore's favorite techniques—giving us cryptic hints, in the first few pages, of events which we will fully understand only by the story's end. But the writer strains credibility somewhat by having Woodrue narrate this episode—the good doctor simply isn't around for certain pivotal events, so he tells us, in great detail, what he *assumes* to be happening. Maybe he's psychic. Or maybe we should just allow Moore some poetic license.

The Saga of the Swamp Thing #22
Swamped

Writer.....Alan Moore
Artists.....Steve Bissette and John Totleben
Editor.....Len Wein
Letterer.....Todd Klein
Colorist.....Tatjana Wood



Woodrue has transported (how?) Swampy to the Louisiana bogs, where they are discovered (how?) by Matt and Abby. Woodrue explains that though the creature looks dead, he really isn't—he's just shut down his mind, taken root, let himself become "as one" (to borrow a phrase from the old **Kung Fu** show) with the surrounding flora. His body has even started to grow vegetables. (This green giant specializes in potatoes.) Abby can't handle this new information and runs off.

The bulk of this issue is devoted to the Swamp Thing's dream, and very odd dream it is. (A film version of 22 could easily share a double bill with Bunuel and Dali's **Un Chien Andalou**.) Meanwhile, in the waking world, Dr. Woodrue eats one of the tubers. His hold on sanity, already tenuous, slips entirely away, apparently as a result of his odd experiment in cajun cuisine. (I must mention that this plot point, like many others in this issue, remains unclear.) He snips off one of the Swamp Thing's flowers, and connects Swampy's consciousness with his own via some not very carefully described Rube Goldberg contraption. This mysterious procedure has startling results: Woodrue becomes "as one" with the world's vegetation, hears their call for revenge upon a world of "screaming meat," and commands a vast army of hate-crazed greenery as it marches against humanity.

****

Imagine a donut hole so large that the donut itself is gossamer thin. That image should give you some idea of what this issue's plot holes do to the story.

How the hell did Swamp Thing get from Washington DC to Louisiana? Did he walk? Did Woodrue truck him there? Couldn't Swampy have just as easily set down taproots in, say, DC's Rock Creek Park? Or maybe on the Mall, right in front of the National History Museum...

And although I've never visited Louisiana, I do know that the bogs there are fairly extensive. So how is it that Matt and Abby just happen across ST after only a few hours of searching?

And why don't those yams (or whatever they are) have the extreme hallucinogenic effects on Woodrue that they produce in later issues? And just what the hell is that device Woodrue attaches to the flower? How do you plug into a flower? Where's the outlet? And how is it that wiring it up a posie to one's noggin allows one to communicate with all the world's vegetation? What's the scientific principle involved here? Did I miss a biology class, or what?

The wonder of it all is, Moore's verbal abilities almost—*almost*—glide one smoothly past these lapses in logic. He's like a painter who craftily uses *chiaroscuro* to disguise faulty anatomy or unsuccessful composition. Note, especially, the page in which Moore introduces Woodrue's machine; the words flow so nicely you hardly notice the fact that we're never told how the damned device works, or what exactly the doctor hopes to do with it. Moore's manner diverts us from his matter, or, rather, his lack thereof. He has excellent prospects in the field of political speechwriting, should he ever decide to turn his hand to another type of fiction.

The dream sequence provides the real fun in this issue; these pages are among the most amusing in the series. Would that the surrounding sections provided adequate contrast. Alas, the quasi-logic of ST's nightmare carries over into the "reality" scenes of the story, making them every bit as irrational.

The Saga of the Swamp Thing #23
Another Green World

Writer. . . . . Alan Moore
Artists. . . . . Steve Bissette and John Totleben
Editor. . . . . Len Wein
Colorist. . . . . Tatjana Wood
Letterer. . . . . John Costanza

Swamp Thing's mind (or spirit or soul—we're never precisely told which) floats through The Green. We are to hear much of The Green in subsequent issues; at times, it seems much like a parallel dimension, while on other occasions it reminds one of the movie **Fantastic Voyage**—except in this case we're seeing vegetable matter, not a human body, on the cellular level. Well, whatever it is, Swampy's there, and he doesn't want to leave.

Woodrue, declaring war on the entire animal kingdom, fires his first shot (or, more precisely, his first shoots) at some cruising teenagers. A pleasant victory, but unsatisfying. He next takes on a small town. Commanding plants to seal the inhabitants in their houses, Woodrue then forces the local greenery to rev up their engines of photosynthesis, [illegible] air that the first stray spark causes a raging inferno. Some plants also attack Abby; she runs to the spot where ST lies rooted. He senses her predicament, and awakens—just in time to confront Woodrue, who is about to annihilate another town with flower power.

****

The flora vs. fauna theme here was to be reworked - and, in my opinion, much improved upon—in 53. But this isn't a bad issue. Woodrue rants a lot, and he spews forth some really choice material. When one victim pleads for "no more," Woodrue replies, "*No more*?? Did you say 'no more' when you and your fellow hamburgers were stripping the land bare? When they dipped their *chainsaws* into the tender flesh of my people?" Even better: "I am the pain and bitterness of the woods! I am come to announce the green millenium! I am one with the wilderness...for I asked of it, saying 'What would you have me do?' And it said 'purify.' And it said 'destroy.' " And so on. If only those loony streetcorner shouters in downtown Los Angeles could show such creativity.

Speaking of creativity, Bissette and Totleben do terrific work in this issue. These two have been responsible for so many outstanding images that it's difficult to single out individual panels or pages for special praise, but the shot of Swamp Thing arising on page 16 is particularly vivid. As is the final page, which includes what must be ST's most memorable "close-up."

"ANOTHER GREEN WORLD, AS THERE WAS AT THE BEGINNING, BEFORE THE BEASTS CRAWLED UP OUT OF THE OCEANS..."

"THOSE LONG, GREEN CENTURIES..."

"...WHERE NO BIRD SANG..."

"...WHERE NO DOG BARKED."

WHERE THERE WAS NO NOISE!

WHERE THERE WAS NO SCREAMING MEAT!!

FOR I AM THE REGRET AND ANGER OF THE FORESTS...

I...

ANGIE!

The Saga of the Swamp Thing #24
Roots

Writer.....Alan Moore
Artists.....Steve Bissette and John Totleben
Editor.....Len Wein
Colorist.....Tatjana Wood
Letterer.....John Costanza

The Justice League of America sits in their orbital hangout, wondering what to do about Woodrue's threat. Turns out, they can't do much.

Neither, it seems, can the Swamp Thing, who rejects Woodrue's offer of co-rulership over a "cleansed" planet. Their battle is hopelessly one-sided (the powers ST will later acquire would have evened this match quite a bit), but Swampy does manage to break Woodrue's arm at one point. Not that *that* will stop him. Woodrue's rampage comes to a halt only when ST points out a basic fact of ecology: plants need animals as much as animals need plants. Without fauna, where can the flora hope to get its carbon dioxide? Apparently, the universal vegetable mind gets the point and withdraws. Woodrue loses contact with his arboreal acquaintances, loses his powers, and loses what few of his marbles he has left.

Swamp Thing returns to the swamp. Woodrue, meanwhile, tries desperately to pass himself off as a mere human being when the Justice League comes for him. Of course, he has a hard time explaining all the leaves and roots growing out of his face. When Green Lantern asks him what is wrong, Woodrue answers, "Oh, you mean my arm! Well, I broke it. An accident. I was just, you know, doing something normal, driving a car, fishing, one of those things us men *do*. And I broke it." And so he goes off to the nuthouse. Or maybe the greenhouse.

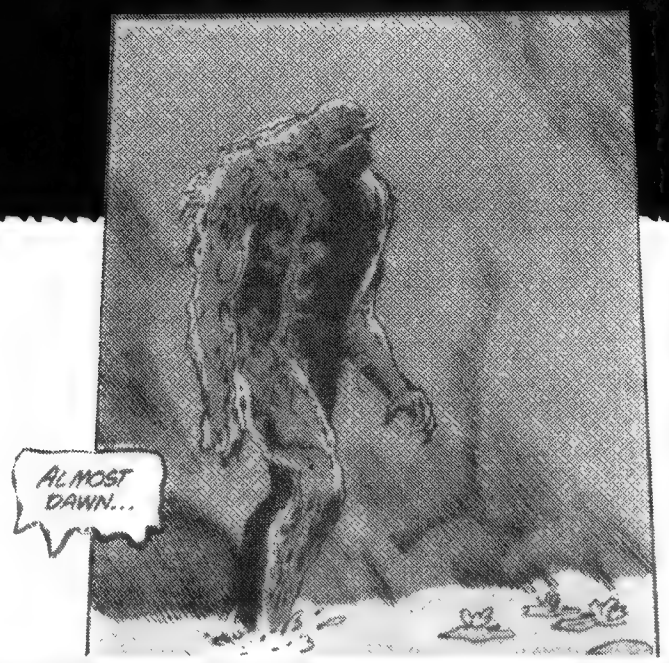
****

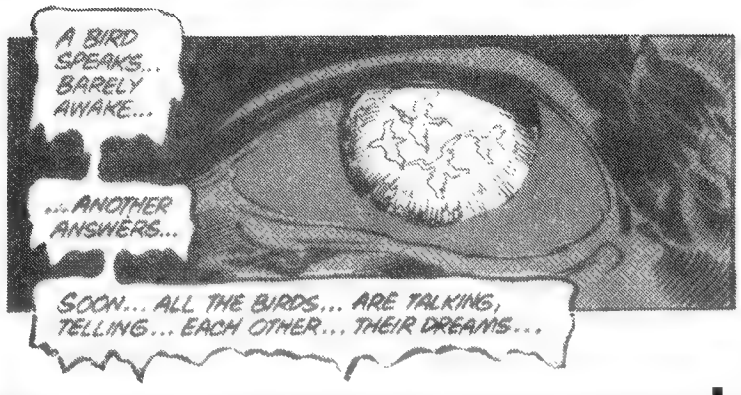
Alan Moore includes the JLA in this issue as skillfully as possible. He never names outright the group or its members, he instructs the artists to keep the faces in shadow, and he generally does his best to make superheroes palatable in a book that doesn't really welcome their presence. And I understand why they're here...after all, if Woodrue really threatens the entire world, why would Swamp Thing be the only more-than-human creature in the entire DC universe to take an interest in the affair?

But that only gives rise to another question, one which I'm sure will rankle any number of comics fans: Why must there be a DC Universe in the first place?

Now before you get out the tar and feathers and the LA phone directory (which doesn't have my address anyways), please consider my point. Consider the advantages of keeping a company's creations more-or-less in their own territories, as is the case over at, say, Eclipse Comics. In the first place, there's the fact that a moody, human-scaled book like **Swamp Thing** is simply the wrong environment for someone like Superman. But that's only the smallest of three good reasons to keep comic book titles separate but equal.

Reason #2: ST is one of those books likely to appeal to folks outside the usual coterie of comics enthusiasts—probably because "monsters" have a long





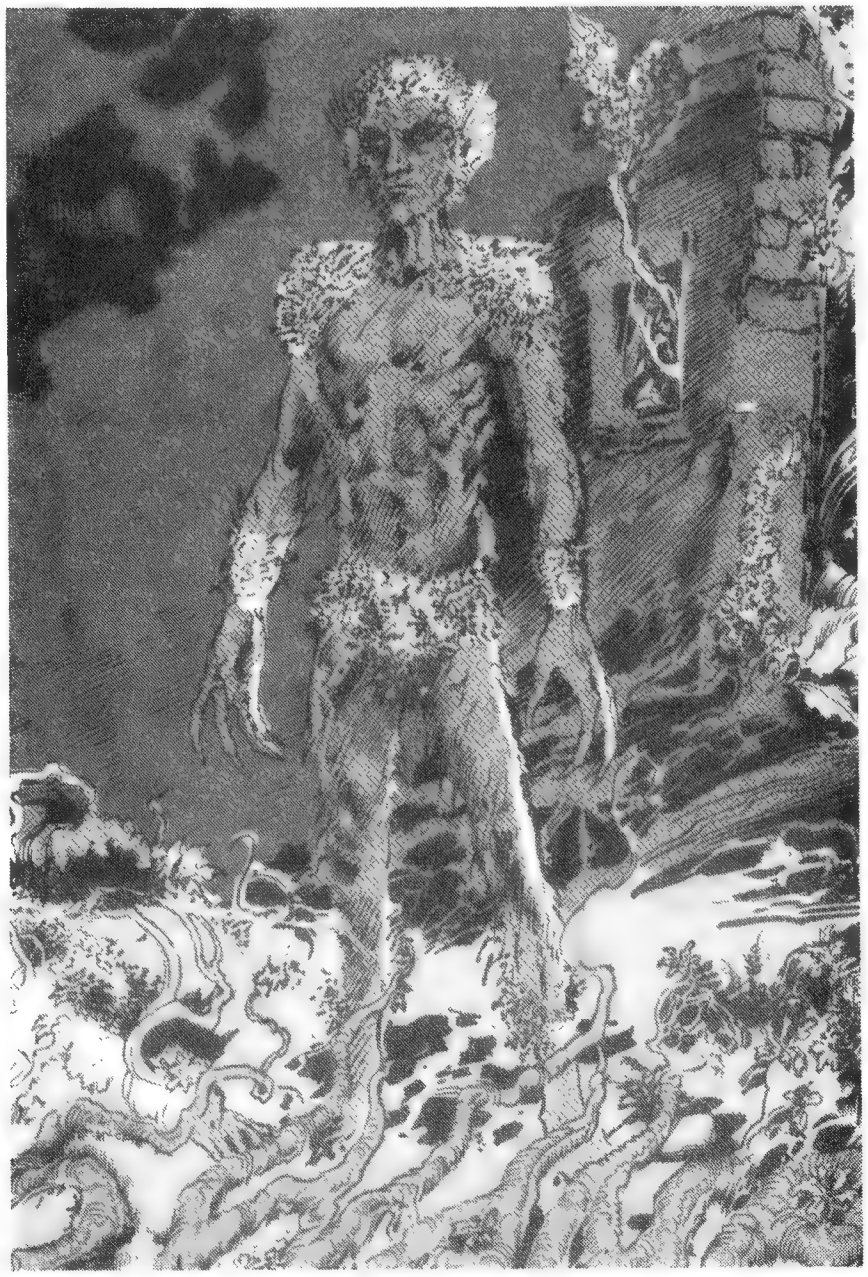
and semi-honorable tradition in the cinema, while superheroes do not. Those who have grown up with the comics medium have become immune to embarassment over the sight of outrageously-muscled men in outrageously-colored long underwear. We fans *accept* all that. Others can't. And non-aficionados have perfected a withering array of snorts and sneers, which they will demonstrate to their comics-reading compatriots at the slightest excuse. "What do you see in those things?" they will ask. And we can hand them, say, ST 43, and expect them to recognise a piece of writing obviously better than any of the inane teleplays they'll watch transfixedly that night. But we cannot hand them ST 24 because that issue contains the goddamned Justice League of goddamned America.

Now when I was a lad (to use the phrase so beloved of Moore's countrymen), I very much enjoyed Marvel's first attempts to pepper each character's adventures with guest shots of all the other characters. But after awhile, the ploy began to cloy. A Spider-Man stretched disbelief just enough, I felt, but a Spider-Man and a Thor and a Dr. Strange and a who-knows-what-else *all at once*? Besides (and this brings us to reason #3), I soon got the queasy feeling that these guest appearances were just a marketing device. Mainstream comics have reached a point where the reader is forced to purchase a company's entire line (in which the quality varies greatly) to follow the stories produced by those artists and writers one favors. This situation isn't fair. And with today's prices, it's a real pain in the wallet.

All right, I'll admit that I enjoyed seeing the Phantom Stranger and the Demon walk into ST's later issues, but at least *they* took part in the stories. The worst thing about 24 is that the JLA has no *raison d'etre* here; they simply make fairly unconvincing excuses for their inability to act. If Swampy can break Woodrue's arm, why can't Superman simply punch a hole through the fellow?

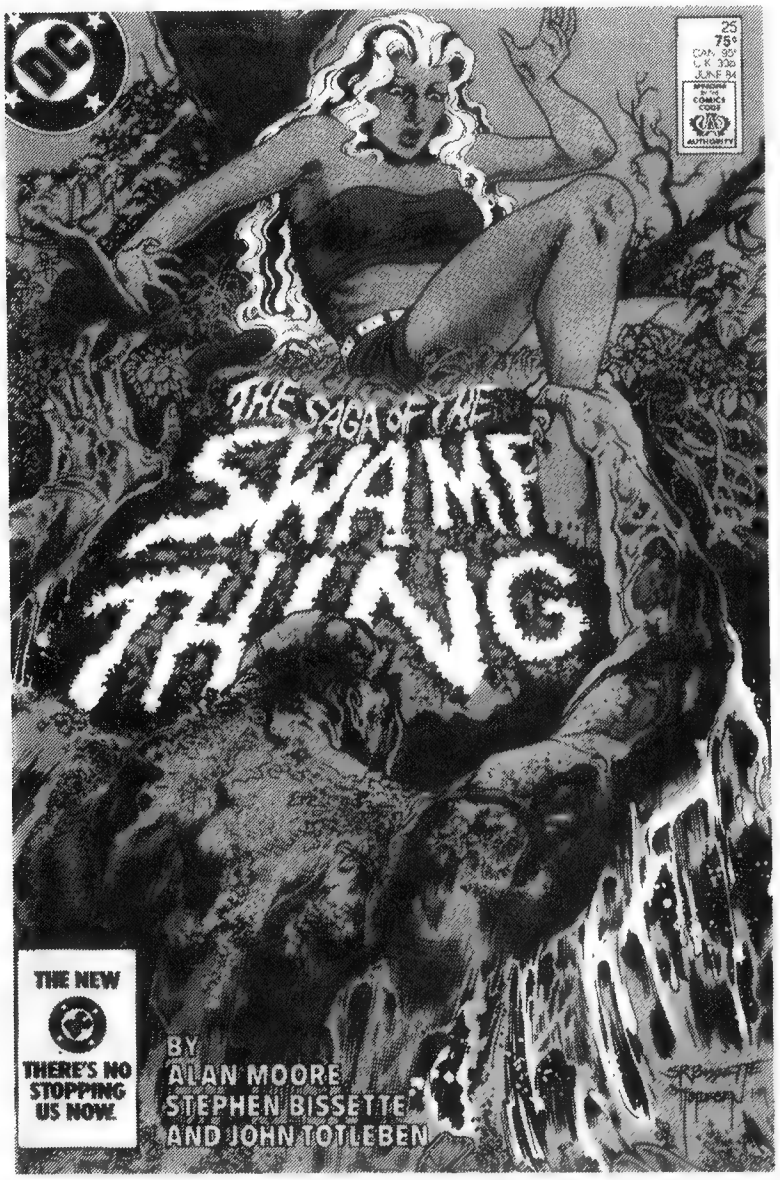
Come to think of it, Moore punches a few more holes in his already well-windowed plot. Woodrue's a doctor—a mad one, yes, but a bright fellow nevertheless. So why his peculiar ignorance concerning the basic facts of photosynthesis, facts known to every high-schooler? You'd think that the assembled veggies of the world, with whom Woodrue's in close contact, could give him the straight skinny on this matter. But *is* Woodrue really on the same wavelength as agriculture united? Or is he just fooling himself? Even *that* point remains unclear by story's end.

If the "Floronic Man" trilogy has one basic flaw, it's Moore's maddening vagueness, his disregard for even the most rudimentary form of internal logic. Yeah, I know that the pictures are pleasant, the captions poetic, and the dialogue lean and convincing. But this is sheen. At the end, Green Lantern asks "What *happened* out here?" You'd be hard-pressed to give a clear answer.



The Saga of the Swamp Thing #25
The Sleep of Reason

Writer.....Alan Moore
Artists.....Steve Bissette and John Totleben
Editor.....Karen Berger
Colorist.....Tatjana Wood
Letterer.....John Costanza



A disturbing fellow named Jason Blood arrives in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. He tells a fellow rider on the bus to expect to be impaled by a swordfish at 5:32; this accident will have something to do with the fact that "Selena has already decided not to buy the lawn furniture." Blood then asks a local head shop proprietor about the recent trade in ouija boards.

Abby, meanwhile, has taken a job at Elysium Lawns, a school for autistic children. She there encounters Paul, a strange, recently-orphaned six-year-old who insists on spelling out loud every new word he encounters. He has a strange belief that someone called "The Monkey King" will come for him if he spells anything incorrectly.

Coincidentally, an auction held that very day sells items that belonged to Paul's parents. Blood attends; he purchases the ouija board they once owned. He also meets a fellow named Corelli, who, Blood insists, will soon be jailed for manslaughter—again, because "Selena doesn't like lawn chairs." A short while later, Blood's cryptic remarks prove true. Corelli's wife, Selena, decides to forego the lawn furniture she intended to buy at the auction in favor of a large, mounted swordfish (the kind one displays over the fireplace). Corelli ties this item to his car's roof. On the way home, he has to make a sudden stop; the swordfish comes loose and plunges directly into a pedestrian—who turns out to be the fellow traveller from page 1.

A flashback gives us the scoop on Paul. His parents played with a ouija board one evening, and spelled out an incantation of some sort (hence Paul's mania for spelling). This charm freed a demon from Hell, Kamara the Monkey King, a creature who feeds on fear. This demon destroyed Paul's parents. But not Paul. It has other plans for the boy.

****

I like the "Demon" trilogy (so-called because Jason Blood is the human habitat for Jack Kirby's character, Etrigan the Demon) better than the three-parter that preceeded it, though even here we find some narrative fuzziness. This problem hurts the middle act most, so I'll explain my objections when I deal with 26. But so far, I've devoted this book to carping while taking Moore's virtues for granted. Time to rectify that situation.

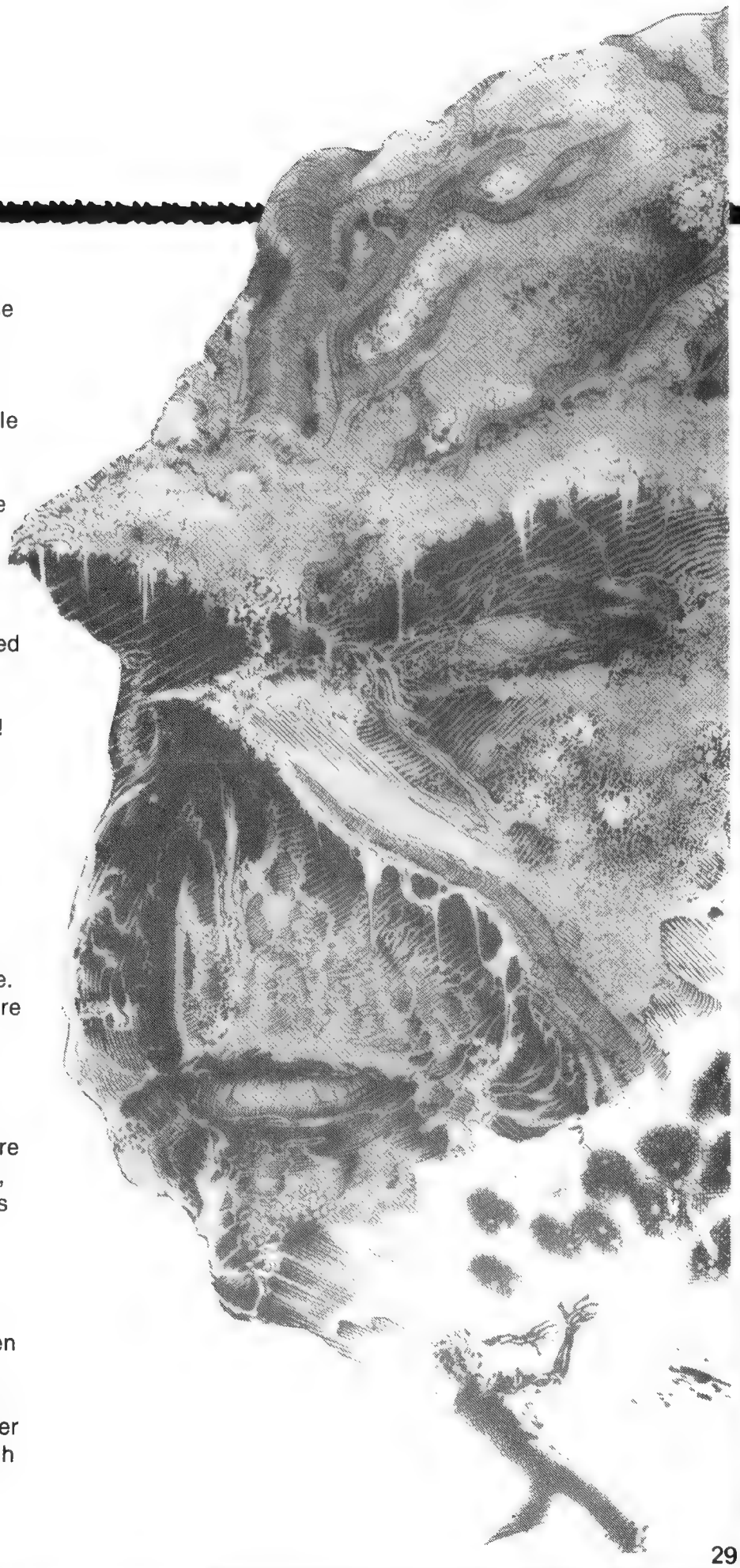
All of Moore's comics abound with the cleverest

dialogue the medium's ever given us. Each character possesses a distinctive voice; if you could somehow erase the pictures in this issue, you'd still know immediately to whom each dialogue balloon points. Yet the words never sound forced. Most other comics writers, even the good ones, would have filled Blood's mouth with prose as purple as grape Nehi, but Moore knows just how far to go. He knows how to sketch in Corelli's whole rotten marriage with the bare minimum of strokes. He knows how to make Abby vulnerable without letting her simper.

Most importantly, he knows how to avoid the Byrne/Claremont trap of having characters endlessly declaim (usually via thought balloons) things we should figure out otherwise. Moore's approach is best appreciated by contrast; grab **Superman** #1 (the *new* #1) and turn to the scene in which Byrne's Superman first encounters Kryptonite. We hear his thoughts: "The pain is incredible! I've never felt anything like it! My limbs feel like silly putty..." And so forth, for about four panels. But why give us all that, when we can clearly *see* the big blue guy writhing?

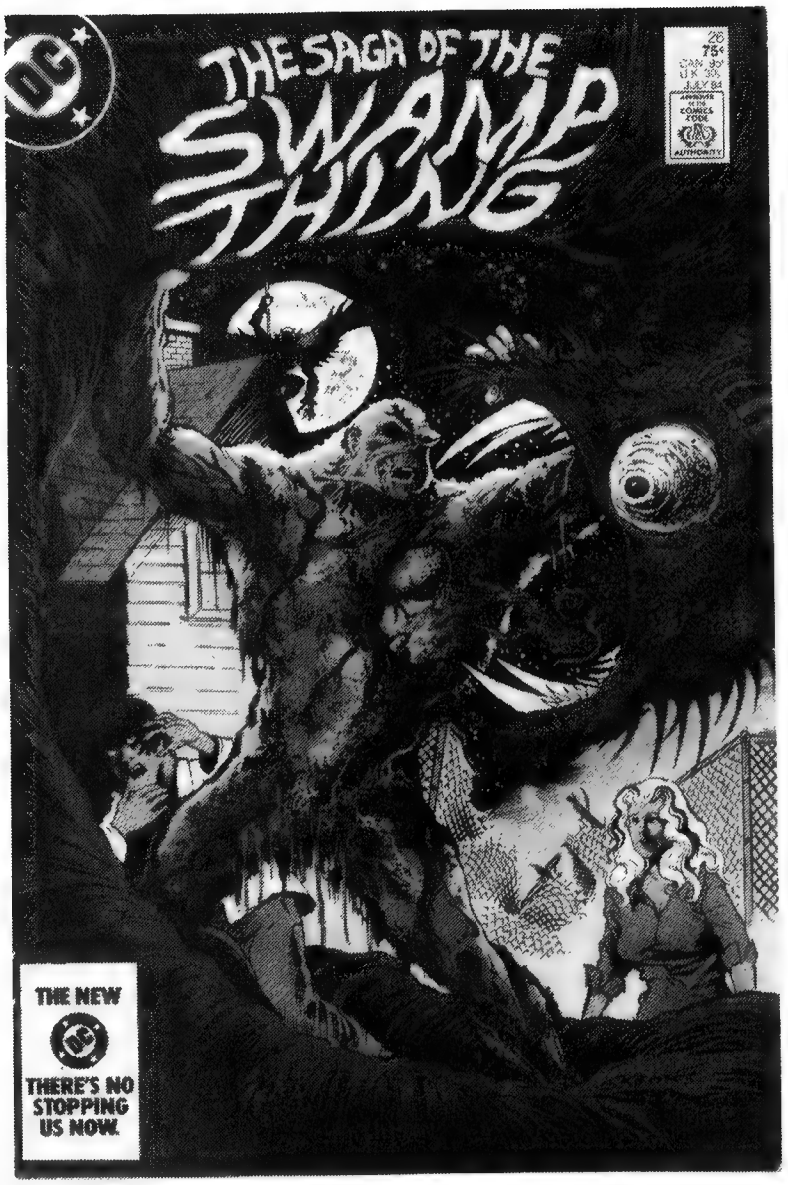
Moore, on the other hand, knows when to shut up. For example, he describes the night Paul became an orphan with exemplary economy: "He lay upstairs. He heard it all...The sound exactly like someone eating lettuce. The silence that followed." And that's it; that's the entire page. Of course, you'd need a bit more description than that were this, say, a Stephen King-ish short story, but Moore understands that he's not writing traditional prose here. He's writing comics. The words are dead without the pictures—but *with* them, a sort of magic happens.

One other item of possible interest. There's a scene here in which the monkey-creature, after killing Paul's parents, creeps into the boy's room and licks his hand. Those of us with an interest in modern myth and urban legends will immediately recognise these details. See folklorist Jan Harold Brunvand's fine book, **The Choking Doberman** for a history of "The Licked Hand," a classic shock story often told as true. Popular fiction, especially horror fiction, often finds good source material in urban legends, just as it always did in the older rural legends. Reference to one in this issue doesn't surprise. What I want to know is whether Moore drew on the tale consciously, or are we dealing with a striking coincidence?



The Saga of the Swamp Thing #26
...A Time of Running

Writer.....Alan Moore
Artists.....Stephen Bissette and John Totleben
Editor.....Karen Berger
Colorist.....Tatjana Wood
Letterer.....John Costanza



Blood meets Abby in the streets, and warns her about Paul; she doesn't listen. At Elysium Lawns, Abby discovers that all the children exhibit particularly bizarre behaviour; they've all drawn pictures of the Monkey King. Paul tells Abby that each child sees the Monkey King as whatever that youngster fears most. She suspects that there may be something to Blood's warning after all. That night, her husband Matt refuses to accompany her when she decides to return to Elysium Lawns, so she asks Alec to accompany her.

Too late: The Monkey King has already begun to barrage the children with terrifying visions of their worst fears Etrigan the Demon, Blood's alter ego, appears on the scene and attacks the Monkey King.

Scene switch: Matt decides he should have helped Abby. He swigs down some courage, starts up the car, and smashes into a tree.

****

Incidentally, the crash occurs at the foot of a Burma Shave sign, despite the fact that these roadside icons left our highways in 1963. Generally, Moore captures the details of American pop culture surprisingly well, but he occasionally gets an item or two wrong. Also, on page 13 Abby refers to a flashlight as a "lamp." Where did she—or, rather, where did Moore—pick up *that* term? I thought the Brits used the word "torch."

All of that is unimportant. This issue doesn't lack verisimilitude; what it needs is another page or two of exposition. Did Bissette get the entire manuscript, or did the mailman misplace a bit of it?

If so, the missing sheets probably detailed events between pages 11 and 12. Abby decides to believe Paul on page 11; on page 12 she walks out on Matt. Now wait a minute—how does she know to expect a visit from the Monkey King that night? Paul didn't exactly detail the M.K.'s modus operandi. Besides, what can *she* do about it? More importantly, we don't learn until page 22 that Abby asked Matt to accompany her, and that he refused. Without this information, pages 12 and 13 make Abby seem awfully unsympathetic; we've no real idea why she's bickering with her husband, or why she walks out in a huff. More bewildering still, Matt at one point screams (regarding the autistic children) "One of them bit you on

the *leg*, Abby...!" Huh? Which? Who? When? Is that damned projectionist showing the reels out of order again...?

Other questions. If the Monkey King killed Paul's parents, why does he let the children live? There's some talk in this issue about the Monkey King needing Paul as his "master" during his holiday on earth; what's all this about? Why do demonic quasi-simians need the help of six-year-old boys in order to visit Louisiana? Just what are the ground rules of Hell?

Speaking of ground rules, some readers—well, at least *this* reader—could have used some background in Demonology. We need more information about Jason Blood, on his alter ego, and why both are so interested in Monkey Kings.

I have to confess here that I never collected Jack Kirby's **Demon** series. God knows I respect the man's art, which I wish to hell Marvel would return to its rightful owner—if they even have it any more—and like everyone else, I am in awe of Kirby's creativity and his contribution to the medium. He is the D.W. Griffith of comics. *But*. The man never could compose dialogue. (Incidentally much the same thing can also be said of Griffith, who authored some of the most inane subtitles ever to impact the silent screen). Kirby has a great sense of pacing and an imagination that won't quit, but his ear is tin. By the time his **Demon** books came out, I had long since wearied of trying to read the unreadable. The character was a stranger to me.

So I was a little irritated when Moore, in this trilogy, forced me to head back to the comics shop and pick up those missed issues. Next time a guest like Etrigan comes to the party, Moore should be a proper host and make introductions.

This issue's title, by the way, comes from **Night of the Hunter**, probably the most original and moving film that Hollywood produced in the '50s. A classic. Yet last time I saw it in a theater, the goons and nitwits in the audience actually laughed at it! I had no choice but to wipe 'em all out with a tactical nuclear missile. Should you care to catch this masterpiece (by director Charles Laughton and Pulitzer Prize-winning author James Agee), show proper respect, or you may suffer a similar fate.

The Saga of the Swamp Thing #27
By Demons Driven!

Writer.....Alan Moore
Artists.....Stephen Bissette and John Totleben
Editor.....Karen Berger
Colorist.....Tatjana Wood
Letterer.....John Costanza

Swampy fights the Monkey King; Abby runs to the swamps with Paul; Etrigan decides that killing Paul would be the surest way to rid the world of the chimp from Hell. Actually, Paul knows a better way: he simply refuses to be afraid of the M.K., who feeds on fear and shrivels for the lack of it. "Little kittens are scarier than you!" Paul screams at the sinister simian. The Monkey King shrinks to the size of an M&M; Etrigan swallows him (it?) in one gulp.

Meanwhile, very interesting things are happening to Matt Cable. On the threshold of death, Matt encounters a talking fly, who informs him that his life can be extended. All Matt need do is open his mouth wide and let the insect crawl in. (If this issue proves anything, it demonstrates that dealing with evil has more to do with ingestion than action.)

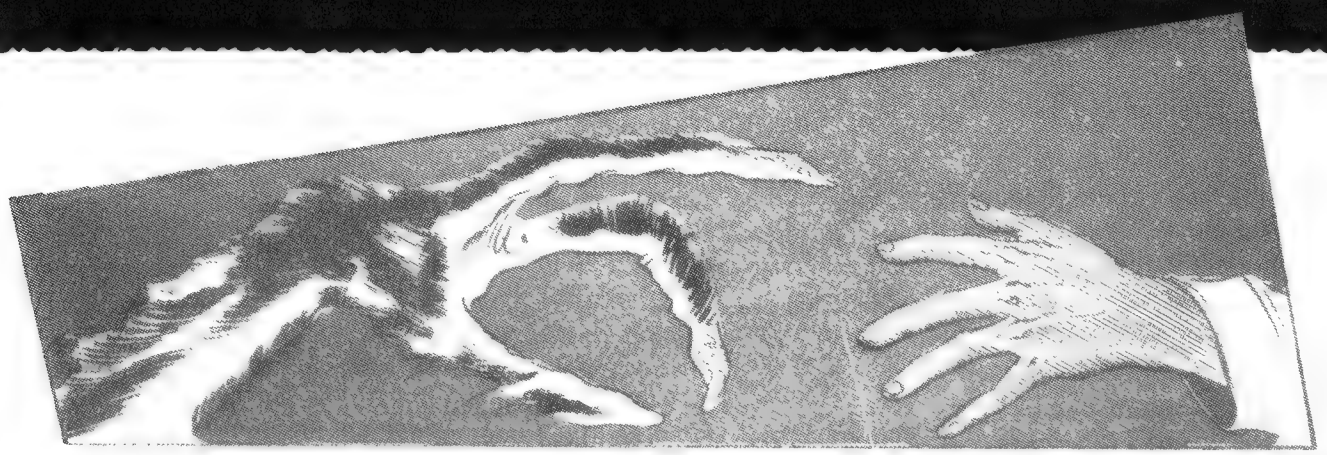
****

Yes, Mr. Moore, I saw that episode of **Star Trek** too.

The monster-that-feeds-on-men's-fears gambit (quite a hoary device, really; **Trek** was scarcely the first to use it) doesn't really work so well in this trilogy as it does elsewhere. Previous writers have used the monster as a symbol for paranoia, for mob madness, for *unreasonable* fear. But here, the Monkey King doesn't seem to symbolise anything. The fiend doesn't feed on, say, the fears that separate races, or on international tensions, or on the sort of mindless apprehension that recently forced Proctor and Gamble to change its logo. (Or even on the kind of fear that a writer fast approaching a deadline can feel!) Instead, this demon concentrates on children's anxieties, on their fears of disease and abusive parents and family tragedy—things that youngsters have every right to be afraid of. I realise that I can't fairly condemn Moore for writing this story, instead of some other one of my choosing, but I did want to note that other authors have used this theme to greater point.

Sorry to be a kvetch, but I have one other quibble. This trilogy gives us a Monkey demon from Hell, another demon named Etrigan, Matt Cable (whose "powers" have provided the series with a long-running subplot), a talking fly (Arcane in disguise) and a Swamp Thing. That's too many monsters for one story. You half-expect Abbott and Costello to show up.

Despite the above reservations, there are things to



admire in this trilogy. Etrigan's dialogue, entirely in verse, obviously required care. Moore took pains to avoid approximate rhyme and sloppy meter, ad he makes the poetry serve, rather than impede, the narrative flow. Probably no other comics writer has ever used, or will ever use, this device so effectively. (Incidentally, though I have never heard any songs by **The Sinister Ducks**, I suspect that if Moore wrote the lyrics, then those must be the only lyrics that *actually rhyme* in the history of rock and roll.)

I also liked the delightfully surreal scene between Matt and the fly. And Moore deserves special credit for managing to speak of childhood's worst fears—even that of sexual abuse—in terms appropriate to a code-approved comic. Of course, he would soon break out of *that* straightjacket.

I can hear some of you asking: Why don't these critiques mention Bissette and Totleben more often? Blame Roget's Thesaurus. It offers only so many synonyms for "amazing" and I'm wary of repeating myself.

"SEE HERE, THE POOR BEWILDERED ORPHAN-BOY, WHOSE PARENTS SET THE MONKEY-DEVIL FREE, PERCEIVING MAGIC AS SOME PARLOR-TOY. THEIR LIVES WERE FORFEIT, AND HIS SANITY.
"ITS NAME IS FEAR. LIKE FEAR IT ALTERS SHAPE, AND YET IT LICKS HIS HAND AND CALLS HIM MASTER.
IN SLAUGHTERHOUSES BEYOND THEIR KEN. SHED NO TEAR FOR THOSE THAT DIE UNSHRIVEN...
"... FOR THEY ARE MEN.
"JUST MEN.
"AND WHAT ARE MEN BUT CHARIOTS OF WRATH...

The Saga of the Swamp Thing #28
The Burial

Writer.....Alan Moore
Artist.....Shawn McManus
Editor.....Karen Berger
Colorist.....Tatjana Wood
Letterer.....John Costanza

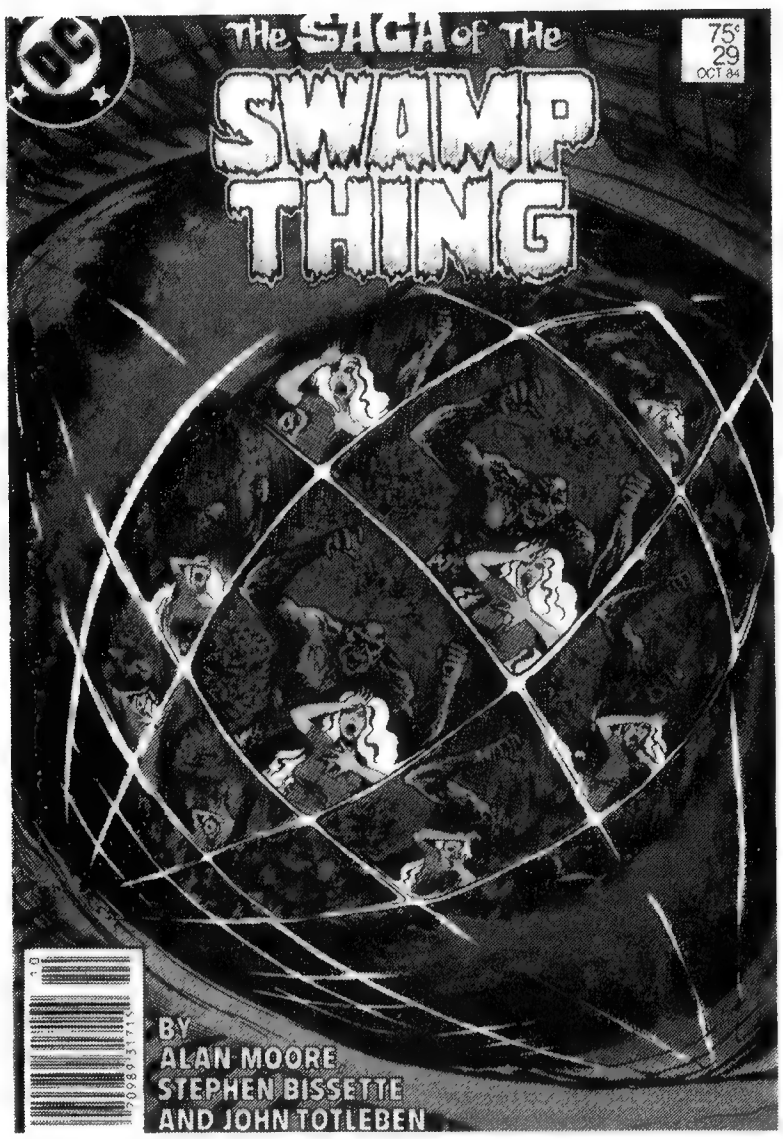
The ghost of Alec Holland haunts the Swamp Thing, who chases this phantom through the bayous, until he comes across the house where the creature was "born." There, the Swamp Thing sees visions of Alec Holland, of the explosion, and of his own rising from the bogs. He comes face to face with himself; the early-day Swamp Thing points out the location of Holland's bones. The Swamp Thing realises that Holland can't rest properly until his remains are properly buried.

****

Basically, this issue provides latecomers with an origin recap, which also serves to codify Moore's revamped version of the character. An unnecessary episode, really. Still, I admire the way Moore concocts—seemingly effortlessly—some just-right dialogue for the flashback of Alec and Linda; one wonders why most of today's Hollywood screenwriters can't handle this sort of simple domestic scene so convincingly. As for McManus, he appropriately allows a Berni Wrightson influence to sway his pencil here, though that influence never "swamps" McManus's own style. I very much like the results, both here and in issue 32, and would welcome future McManus work on the strip.

The Saga of the Swamp Thing #29
Love and Death

Writer.....Alan Moore
Artist.....Stephen Bissette and John Totleben
Editor.....Karen Berger
Colorist.....Tatjana Wood
Letterer.....John Costanza



Matt Cable seems to have finally put his act together. He's stopped whining and stopped drinking. And he's bought Abby a beautiful new house, which he can afford now that he has a job with a firm called Blackriver Recorporations. Abby meets Matt's co-workers. Upon first seeing them, she has a strange visionary episode in which they all appear as decaying corpses; a blink, and they re-appear as normal people. One of these co-workers is named Sally Parks; the name seems somehow familiar to Abby. But her apprehension is outweighed by her happiness that Matt's fortunes have finally reversed. That night, she and her husband make love for the first time in quite awhile.

Next day, she visits the town library and happens upon the book, **Deadlier Than the Male**, about Sally Parks. She takes it home and reads it; seems that her husband's co-worker used to be a mass murderess who was killed by police in 1962. Suddenly Abby understands what "recorporation" means; she realises why Matt is acting so entirely out-of-character and, recalling the previous night, she suddenly feels polluted and unclean.

In a frenzy, Abby tears off her clothes, burns them, showers, douses herself in perfume, scrubs her skin until it bleeds—to no avail. There's no getting rid of the smell...the smell of rotting insects. Her husband comes home, bringing with him his friends from work. Abby blurts out that she knows who "Matt" really is, and asks what he wants of her. "That's easy," says the thing-in-Matt's-body. "Just say Uncle."

****

No way they were going to get *this* story past the Comics Code Authority, what with those quasi-nude shots of Abby bleeding, and the vague, fairly horrifying suggestions that some vile seminal substance has contaminated her. Three cheers to editor Karen Berger, who understood that she could best serve her strip by clearing obstacles from the talents' path. If the censors don't like a story, to hell with them. The CCA stamp reappears on the cover of #30; after that, it vanishes.

I've read this story a few times now, and it still gives me a queasy feeling. I can only imagine how it might affect female readers, for this issue virtually catalogs women's sexual fears—fears of being deceived, overwhelmed, and above all else, *invaded*. On the most obvious level, the story trades on anxiety over venereal diseases, but it also carries undeniable overtones of assault and incest ("Matt" is really Arcane, Abby's uncle), and the final reference to gang-rape. *Very* creepy stuff. Be careful guys. Handing this issue over to your girlfriends could get you back a copy that's ripped in half!

Though ST is ostensibly a "horror" strip, #29 remains the series' one true goose-pimpler. It's also the first issue in which Alan Moore showed hints of what he could *really* do, although a sort of power failure dims the next two installments.

The Saga of the Swamp Thing #30
A Halo of Flies

Writer.....Alan Moore
Artists.....Stephen Bissette and Alfredo Alcala
Editor.....Karen Berger
Colorist.....Tatjana Wood
Letterer.....John Costanza

Arcane has returned, and "shockwaves of nightmare ripple out across the sleeping continent." Cows give birth to deformities; pets turn on their masters; spouses turn on each other; childish misbehaviour becomes unprecedentedly cruel and destructive; swarms of ladybugs attack the population. "Beneath the earth there are muffled, booming voices...and beneath the ocean there are terrible lights..."

Arcane decides to keep Abby alive just long enough to tell her how he escaped his last apparent demise. (Comic book villains *do* have certain traditions to uphold!) Seems he really did die, and went to Hell, but before the damned could fully embrace him, he "struggled free" (*How*? Mr. Moore, you're fudging again...!) and made his way back to our plane of existence. He realised that Matt Cable possessed certain powers, which would be at Arcane's disposal should he be able to commandeer the body. Thus, Arcane engineered the entire "demon" episode, including the car accident. Now that he possesses Matt Cable's body, he can use Cable's psychic powers to full effect.

And now that Abby knows the full scoop, she can go. Disembodied hands reach up from the floor, and drag her below.

Arcane finds Swamp Thing, exchanges pleasantries, and tells the creature where to find Abby. And find her he does. Or rather, he finds her corpse.

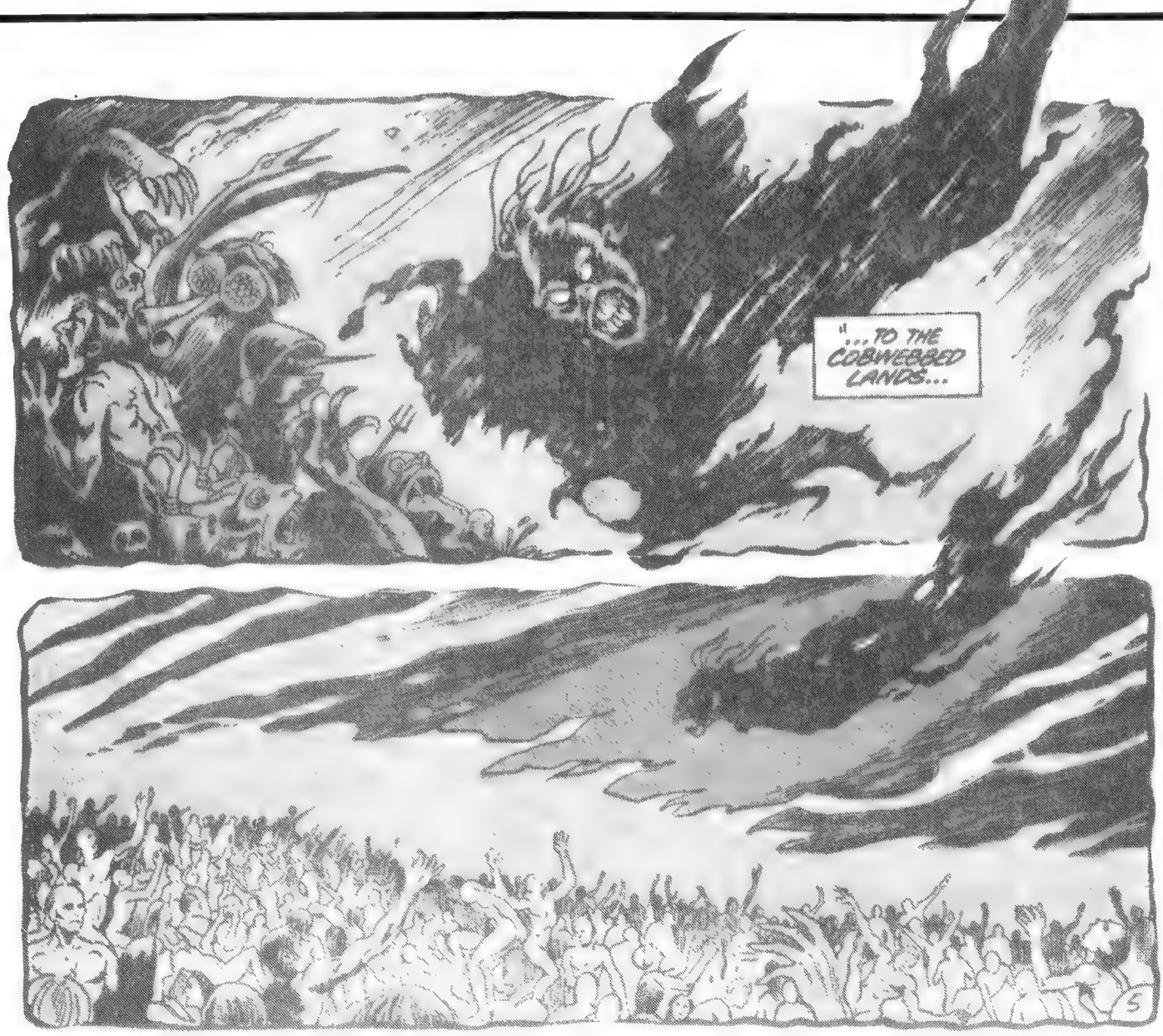
****

The middle act of the *arcanus redivicus* trilogy falters a bit, but it doesn't threaten to disintegrate before our eyes, the way part two of the "Demon" story did. Mostly, this story ties up the business about Matt Cable, who for the past ten issues or so has been using his psychic powers to rig up a sort of 3-D version of Penthouse Video. This subplot provided previous issues with some genuinely interesting pages; I especially liked the bit where Cable turned Abby's clothes into a similacrum of the woman herself and told it to "kneel." But issues 20-27 also tended to have a lot going on, and the more-or-less extraneous scenes with Matt often seemed to get in the way.

Alfredo Alcala has long held a reputation as one of the most careful, detailed inkers in comics, and it's hard to conceive of an embellisher more sympatico with Totleben's almost-inimitable approach. By no stretch of

the imagination can one say that the two inkers work in an exactly similar style. But I suspect that both Totleben and Alcala favor pens, which makes them something akin to industry mavericks; for years now, comics inkers have stuck to their brushes—except for odd ducks like Gil Kane, who, I'm told, likes to ink his own work with felt tip markers.

Though it's entirely *appropos de rein*, I'd like to mention that certain events in this issue (and elsewhere) strongly indicate that Alan Moore's something of a closet Fortean. Those unsure what the term "Fortean" means should check out the collected **Books of Charles Fort**, particularly pages 276-279, 391-393, and 738-749, if you want some interesting history on rampaging ladybugs, subterranean moanings, and odd undersea lights.



Saga of the Swamp Thing #31
The Brimstone Ballet

Writer.....Alan Moore
Artists.....Rick Veitch and John Totleben
Editor.....Karen Berger
Colorist.....Tatjana Wood
Letterer.....John Costanza

Abby is as dead as Marley's ghost, and Swampy can't even hope that she's gone to a better place. Seems that when Arcane says "Go to Hell," he means it. "Such is my power," Arcane says. "The power to condemn a stainless innocent to the pit...the power to resurrect the guilty dead and dress them in warm new protoplasm..." Arcane chases ST into the swamps. The creature runs for awhile, then decides to run around and beat Arcane up. Matt Cable's personality begins to reassert itself; he drives Arcane out. Of course, without Ol' Uncle A.'s malign influence, Matt's mortal injuries return. He has some of his psychic power left, however, and uses it to restore life to Abby's body. She breathes, but her spirit's long gone, and there's nothing further Matt can do.

****

This episode worked pretty well for me until I wrote the above summary and caught the blemishes. Moore's enviable way with words almost, but not quite, disguises the narrative acne.

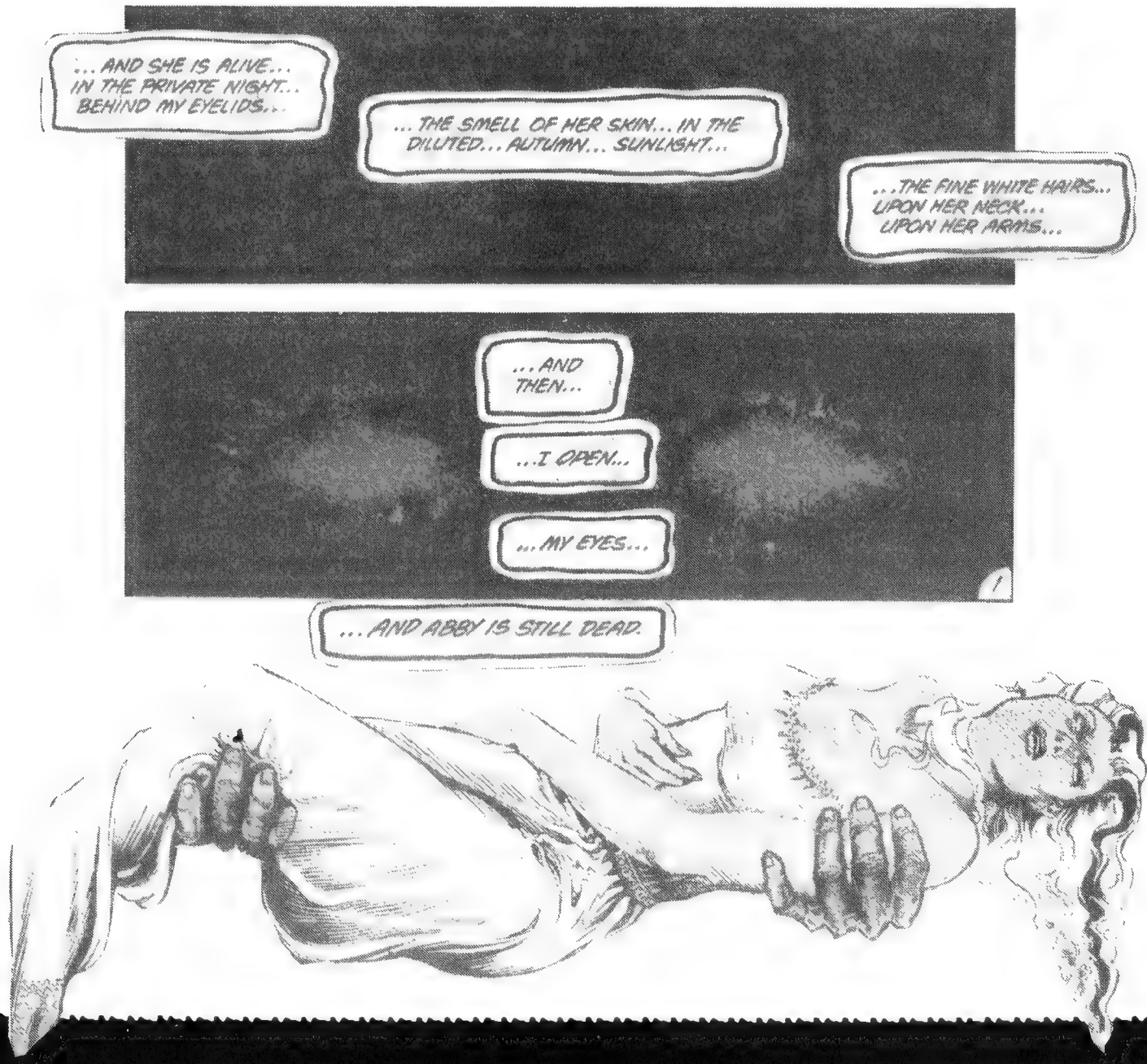
If Arcane can send folks to the flames with a snap of his fingers, then why does he let Swampy knock him around so much? Why not tell the big green guy to "be off" and have done with him? (Commandment #1 for comic book writers; Thou shalt not give thy heroes or villains power like unto the Lord thy God, lest ye paint thyself into a corner.) Furthermore, if you look closely at this trilogy while resisting the narrative flow, you'll notice that the only thing Swampy *does* in all three issues is provide some clobbering on pages 13-15 of issue 31, and even that violent outburst has little to do with the story's resolution. Just what triggers Cable's return? And why did Arcane remove poor, dead, damned Abby's clothes and dress her in a sexy nightgown? And if Matt's powers can bring Abby back to life, why didn't he save himself at the scene of the accident?

And how can Abby be alive and damned at the same time, anyways? I always thought that Judeo-Christian tradition defined death as the separation of the soul and the body—and while you'd hardly call **Swamp Thing** propaganda for piety, the stories—as do most horror stories—tend to work within the framework of a more-or-less Christian theology/mythology.

Yes, but—the thing *reads* well. It's hard to stay mad at

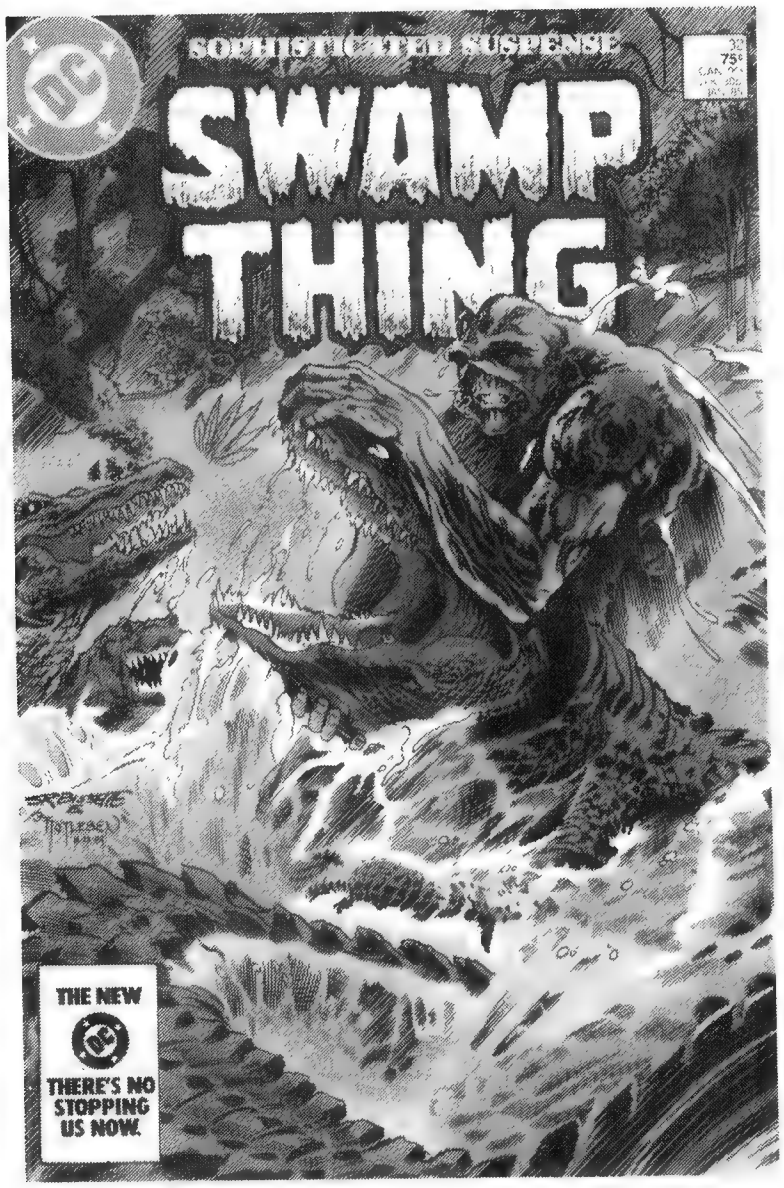
this story. It flows nicely, the dialogue crackles, and the finale sets up what may be Moore's most imaginative work to date.

Incidentally, we should take this opportunity to put a rumour to rest. No, Rick Veitch and Stephen Bissette are *Not* the same person; they just *seem* to be artistic doppelgaengers. How they both got to be so good, and so good in such similar ways, remains one of the medium's mysteries. Maybe they both use some obscure brand of pencil that nobody else knows about. (Editor's note: I hate to be intrusive here, Martin, but there is at least one obvious reason that they are both so good in such similar ways. Both gentlemen are graduates of the excellent training of the Joe Kubert Art School, perhaps the single best educational institution in the field, founded and spiritually as well as physically guided by Joe Kubert, one of *the* grand old men of the industry. Both Bissette and Veitch, as well as a number of other graduates, do use many similar approaches to comic book storytelling, tricks learned no doubt at the feet of Joe.)


...AND SHE IS ALIVE... IN THE PRIVATE NIGHT... BEHIND MY EYELIDS...
...THE SMELL OF HER SKIN... IN THE DILUTED... AUTUMN... SUNLIGHT...
...THE FINE WHITE HAIRS... UPON HER NECK... UPON HER ARMS...
...AND THEN...
...I OPEN...
...MY EYES...
...AND ABBY IS STILL DEAD.

The Saga of the Swamp Thing #32
Pog

Writer.....Alan Moore
Artist.....Shawn McManus
Editor.....Karen Berger
Colorist.....Tatjana Wood
Letterer.....John Costanza



A giant turtle-spaceship disgorges seven small aliens, who bear a suspicious resemblance to the characters in Walt Kelly's famous strip **Pogo**. They explore the bogs, hoping to repopulate their species there. When they happen upon ST, they shoot him down with a "spotgun," and tie him up. The leader of the crew, Pog, decides to watch over the creature while the others continue their wanderings.

Soft-hearted Pog can't bear to see a "co-creature enstrained," so he loosens ST's bonds, and explains, via pictographs, his party's predicament. Pog's planet, it seems, was overrun by monstrous apes, who saw themselves as sole masters of their globe; worst of all, they acquired a taste for their fellow creatures. Pog and his friends had to leave, and search for a new planet on which to "reprocrate." Earth, however, isn't it—as ST makes clear: He takes Pog to a nearby hot dog stand, and demonstrates that out planet also has its carnivores.

Pog's alligator-like friend, Bartle, has meanwhile discovered a nest of real crocodilians. Not understanding the peril, Bartle rushes to "engrace" his "long-last broodlings." Pog and ST hear Bartle's screams, and rush to the site, only to find that the little fellow has been "discorpsified." The aliens hold a brief ceremony for their departed friend, then they enter their turtle-ship and leave Earth for good.

****

When I had lunch a short while ago with long-time comics fan and prolific author James Van Hise, he pegged this issue as the first to demonstrate that "Moore wasn't just marking time on the strip, that he was really going to push this stuff." That assessment rings true, though some might prefer to peg an earlier episode as the turning point. Moore had long made clear that he was not a hack, but a craftsman. But when this issue and the annual came out in the same month, he began telling us that he wasn't just a craftsman, but the fellow who might just "recorpsify and deliverate" his medium.

This issue works in more than one way. It's a warm-hearted tribute to Walt Kelly's beloved strip, but even readers too young to remember **Pogo** can enjoy the story; they won't get that discomforting feeling that they've been invited to a party where they don't know any of the guests. The story reminds us of our environmental obligations, of course, but it also reminds us of lost innocence. Pog and co. are genuinely childlike creatures, and their hilarious Kelly-speak is just the sort of whimsical language that children delight in (or used to delight in, before our present post-verbal era.) They're the unfallen, and they remind us of how far we've plunged—both as a race, exercising arrogant dominion of the planet, and as individual readers, having cast off and scorned the enjoyments of our youth.

Shawn McManus, who did such a fine job in issue 28, here contributes so many nice pages that even his previous work looks anemic by comparison. All in all, a terrific issue.

The Saga of the Swamp Thing #33

Writer.....Alan Moore
Artist.....Ron Randall
Editor.....Karen Berger
Colorist.....Tatjana Wood
Letterer.....John Costanza

Issues

A scant thirty days previous, the Swamp crew turned out two of its finest and most thoughtful stories. Now it's filler time.

In a dream, Abby meets the caretakers of the House of Mystery and the House of Secrets; the latter's landlord insists that he has a very special secret for Abby. The secret takes the form of a story, and the story takes the form of eight pages of reprint material, i.e., the very first Swamp Thing story by Wein and Wrightson. In that story, you may recall, the monster was Alex Olsen and the setting was somewhere around the turn of the century. Therein lies the secret: Holland was not the first swamp creature. Apparently, the fates decree that Swamp Things pop every so often as circumstances demand, sort of like Vishnu's avatars or Democratic presidents. But this info won't benefit Abby much. Seems she chose the wrong house: "Mysteries are wonders you can ponder and share. Secrets are a burden to carry alone." She wakes up, and her newly-gained insight into ST's background recedes into some far corner of her mind before she can write down the particulars of her dream.

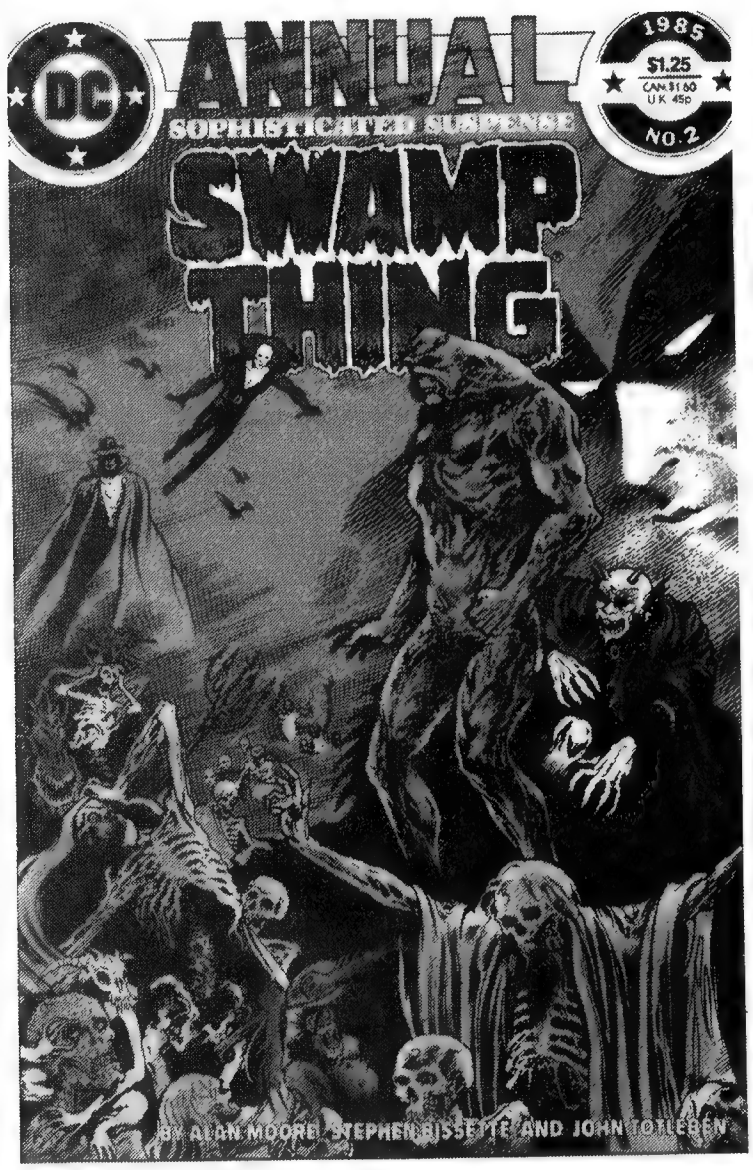
****

For a filler issue, this isn't bad. Good to see Cain and Abel again; for some reason, Moore plays coy about giving their proper names, though he's much less hesitant about identifying them as *the C and A. "We have been charged with keeping of the stories, you and I," says Cain to his* brother. "Who better? We were in the *first* story." When these two were emceeing **House of Mystery** and **House of Secrets**, they did little more than tell stories themselves. But here the storytellers become full characters in their own right. Best scene: Cain, peeved at his sibling, smashes Abel's skull with a rock—not their first or last adventure in fratricide. "The same act over and over again," Cain explains; "it's our punishment for doing it the first time." Abby doesn't find this arrangement fair: "Why should you both be punished for something *you* did?" "Of course it's fair," Cain replies. "I'm being punished for being the first predator, and *he's* being punished for being the first victim."

Ron Randall draws a staggeringly sexy version of Abby, whose nightgown generates a fair amount of suspense. As you turn the pages, you keep on wondering how much further down her shoulders the straps will drop.

Swamp Thing Annual #2
Down Amongst the Dead Men

Writer.....Alan Moore
Artists.....Steve Bissette and John Totleben
Editor.....Karen Berger
Colorist.....Tatjana Wood
Letterer.....John Costanza



The Swamp Thing goes to Hell.

****

Yes!

With a lot of comics these days, getting through them *once* is about as much fun as a tax audit. But I've read this one maybe five or six times, and each time I see something new to make me smile.

The whole superhero game—perhaps the whole comics medium—has little more going for it than sheer audacity. The best comics are cheap tarts; they're insolent and low and they'll do *anything* for you and not give a damn what polite society thinks. But the decades have taken the edge off that audacity; the genre's become a bit old and crusty and more than a little set in its ways. With this story, Moore brings back some of comics' original, gleefully brazen spirit by presenting the boldest, craziest, most beautifully over-the-edge concoction the medium's seen in years.

For Moore does nothing less than whip up a fully functional theology out of DC Comics detritus; he paints detailed pictures of Heaven and Hell and populates them with old comic book characters. And it works. I mean, people have killed and died for religions that make less sense than the fauve-colored faith promulgated here. Catechism teachers everywhere, take note: Your charges will find Heaven a more exciting prospect if you tell them that cool dudes like the Spectre help run the place.

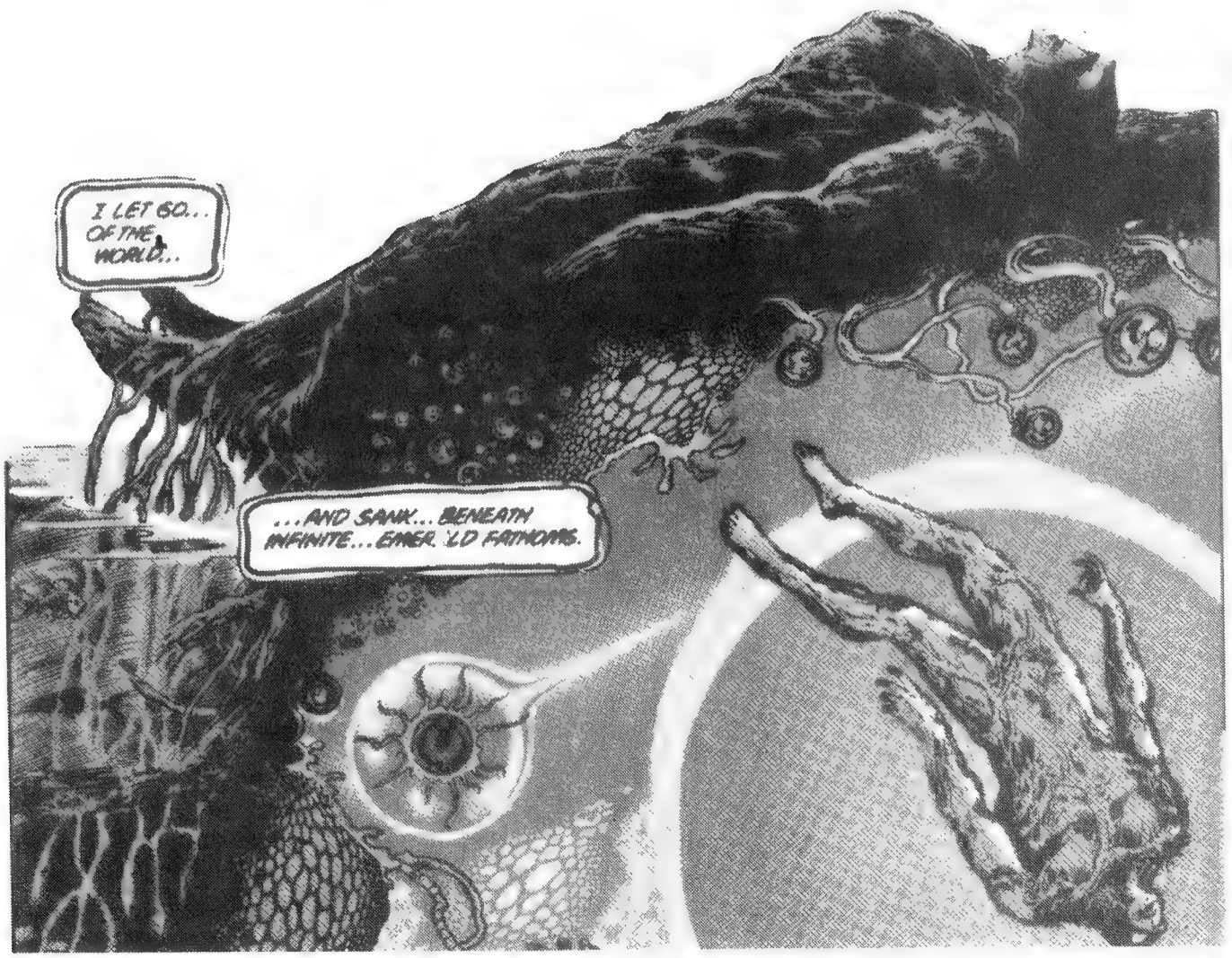
Moore's story has ancestors. (In comics, I mean—in mainstream literature, Dante and Milton provide the obvious precedents.) Stan Lee, according to rumour, once wanted to do a comic revolving around the adventures of God—a notion that died immediately of frozen-foot syndrome. A shame, too; such a comic would have won the audacity sweepstakes hands down. Lee impressed me mightily when he first wrote the Silver Surfer vs. Mephisto tale—wonder how it reads these days?—though one was always unsure whether the big M was meant to be Old Nick himself or some lower lord of an infernal fiefdom. After the **Exorcist** craze, the dean of the damned made personal appearances in a number of mainstream comics, and Marv Wolfman handled the theme rather well in his **Tomb of Dracula** series; for the most part, though, these mid-'70s comic book glimpses of life Down Under were not so much bold as faddish. They were also incomplete. Previous

comics writers—restrained by the threat of irate parents, or perhaps by what passes for good taste in the comics industry, or perhaps by the limits of their imaginations—never dared to give us a true roadmap of the afterlife. They didn't have that sort of audacity.

Now, in the unenlightened '80s, at a time when the major comic book companies have become large, culturally conservative institutions, and at a time when frighteningly-influential television preachers crusade against most comics (and all other popular fiction that doesn't toe the theological line) as "demon-infested," Moore has given us a full-fledged comic book Hell. And (you can almost hear him saying) anybody who doesn't like it can go there.

He also gives us a Heaven, and manages the trick, which eluded even Dante and Milton, of making paradise as interesting as the other place. Okay, so one could quibble about Moore's method for sneaking his protagonist past Saint Peter's gates—the Swamp Thing just sort of, you know, *wills* himself there. But it's hard to think of any truly credible mechanism for Swampy to make the big leap, and still be able to leap back, so I'll excuse the bit of a fudge.

I'll also excuse, even welcome, the presence of so many DC superheroes in this story. True, I earlier made a plea (regarding the Woodrue/JLA issue) for keeping individual comic book characters in more-or-less separate domains. But you know what Emerson said about consistency. I'm happy to reverse, or at least modify, my previous ruling, and declare that Deadman, the Phantom Stranger, the



Spectre, and Etrigan all belong in this strip, in a way that the JLA did not. For three reasons:

1) The characters guest-starring here suit ST's milieu. For reasons that I can't really verbalise without feeling silly, Deadman looks a great deal more natural flying through these pages than would, say, Green Lantern.

2) When this book came out, none of this issue's visiting characters had his own book. (At this writing, the Demon has a miniseries going and the Spectre's about to be born again.) These were no longer lead players; they had segued fairly naturally into supporting roles. Because we didn't see them every month, they weren't overly familiar, and Moore could subtly reshape the characters without stepping on some other writer's toes.

3) The presence of costumed types in such atypical surroundings just makes the story seem all the more outrageous, for exactly the same reasons that a black velvet painting would look more outrageous in a museum than in a small Mexican restaurant. When we saw the JLA fret over the Floronic Man, we saw more-or-less standard comic book fare. When we see the Spectre as the guardian of Heaven's back alley exit, we see one of the most memorably bizarre sequences in the entire run of this bizarre book.

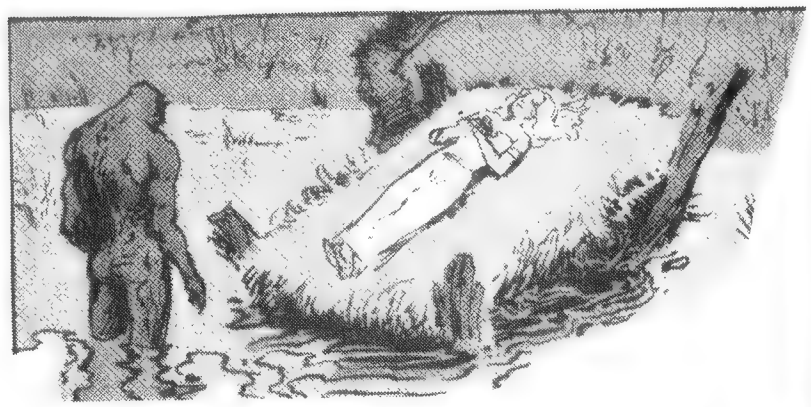
This issue also gives us a few farewell glimpses of ST's adversaries. We discover that General Sunderland now serves as bootlicking toady to demon potentates Flutch and Muttlecraunch (who looks suspiciously like a penis-monster from a famous Francis Bacon painting!). (Well, if Bissette is going to steal, he at least has the taste to lift from the greatest living artist.) And Arcane's fate makes for, perhaps, the series' most memorable exchange. His head perched high above a resinous mound of hatching insect eggs, Arcane asks the creature "How many years have I *been* here?" Swampy answers: "Since yesterday." Arcane's shrieks shake the walls of the inferno.

That touch alone makes this as horrifying a Hell as any ever conjured up by Jonathan Edwards or Stephen Deadelaus' seminary instructor. (Modern-day fire-and-brimstone preachers don't paint nearly so vivid a picture of the Pit, though they try incessantly. Moore should hire out his services to them.) But the writer and the artist go on to give us an ever more inventive variety of demons, who all have terrific names like Rundlethratt and Festlequirm, and who all speak in odd, contagious speech patterns: "The bugger's bled my neb!" "Fasten your gob, fellow." "Muttlecraunch, you tumorous excrescence!" "Be still, my little slug-pudding..."

And who can forget the finale, in which Arcane detaches his head from insect-mountain and goes bouncing off after ST, who has found Abby and plans to re-unite body and soul? Uncle A.'s disembodied noggin sinks its teeth into Swampy's shin even as the Demon employs the "exhalation infernal" to open a "chymic window" onto the plane of mortality. (Incidentally, this incantation was obviously modeled on, and compares favorably with, the witches' spell in **Macbeth**.) Arcane spews one last great curse at ST: "I hate youdieskumkill you murder eatyourbrains hate tear your heartkillyou deaddeaddead." Then Etrigan kicks the head away as though it were a football.

And there's nothing for a reader to do but whimper with delight. It's a rare delight in comics, these days, for the medium's generally gotten too damn stuffy to carry off this sort of outlandishness. But Moore knows how to carry it off. He writes a story that recognises no bounds, and makes it work; he raids Christianity's territory, clears it of its dull and crumbling structures, and builds an Oz on the site. This comic book is a mad and wonderful thing.

P.S. (remarkably appropriate initials here): Moore thinks ahead. Check out page 25, where the Phantom Stranger mentions that "Within this place are creatures that would tear the wings from angels as a moment's respite from boredom." He should know. Little did we know, though, when the second ST annual first came out, that nearly two years later Moore would use this offhand comment as the basis for his Phantom Stranger origin story. I must say, however, that I had *always* pegged PS as the Wandering Jew. Or maybe Lohengrin.

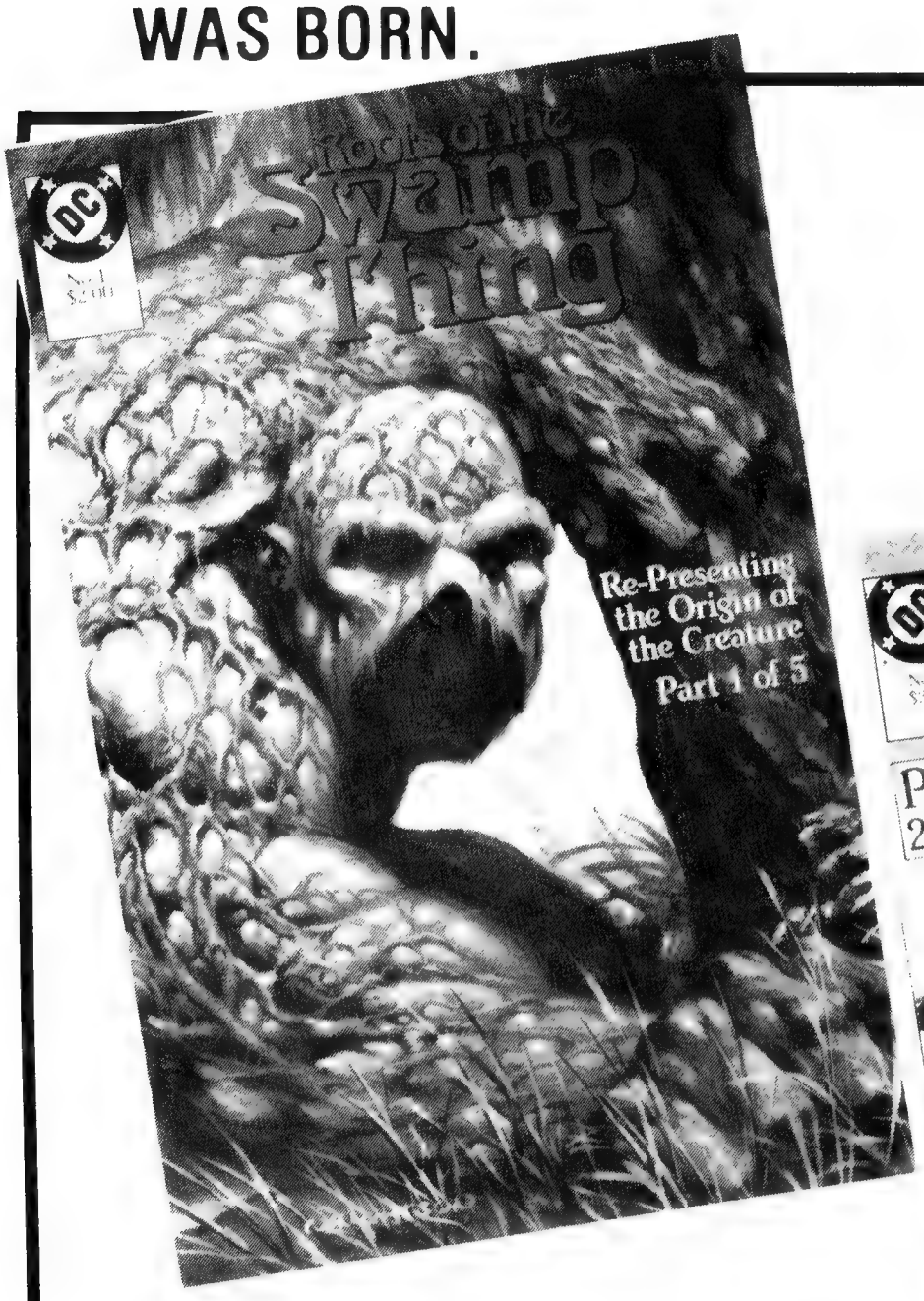


YOU'RE CRYING
ALAN MOORE,
40

When the Wein/Wrightson issues were reprinted...

A GALLERY OF COVERS

WAS BORN.



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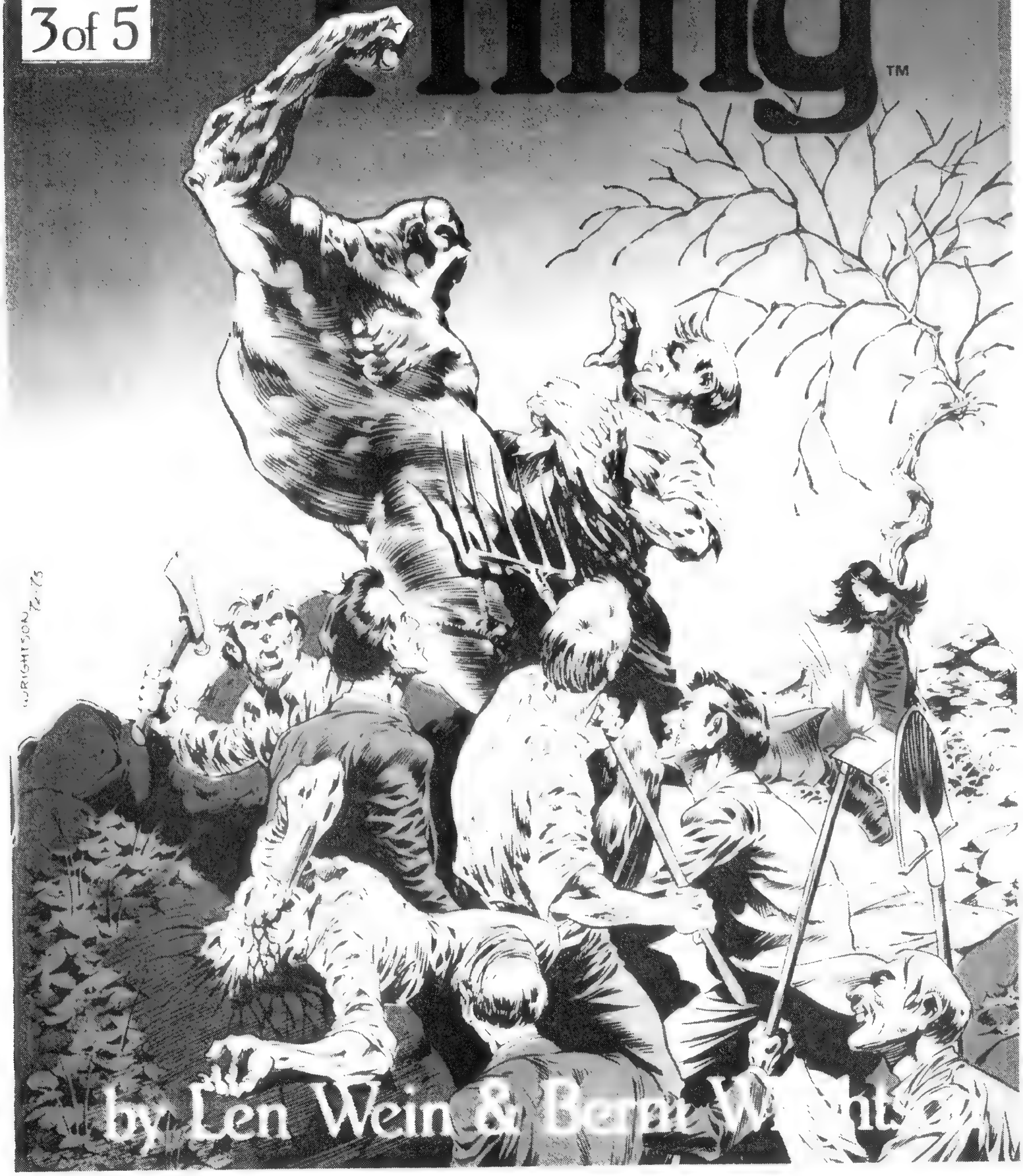

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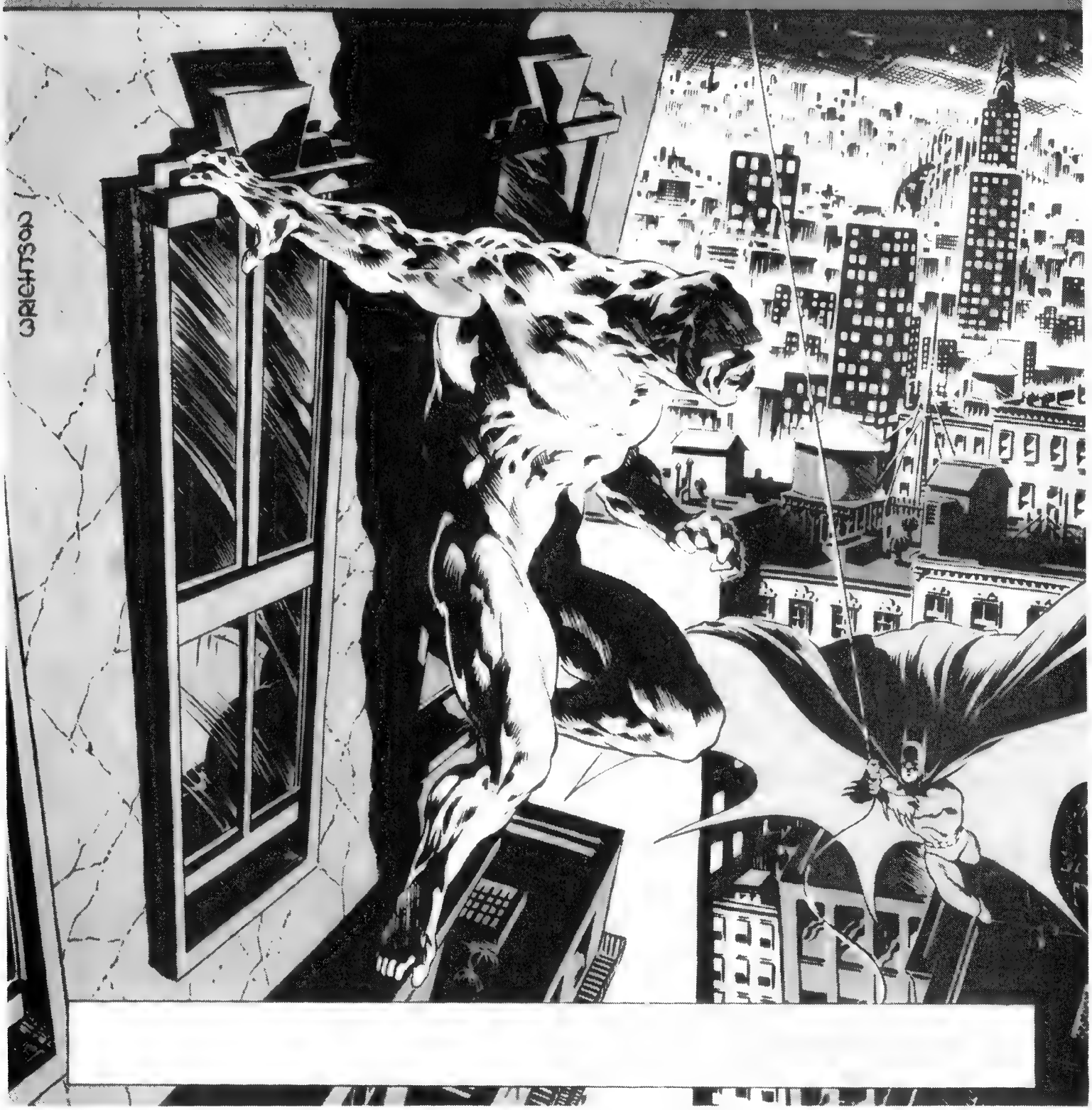

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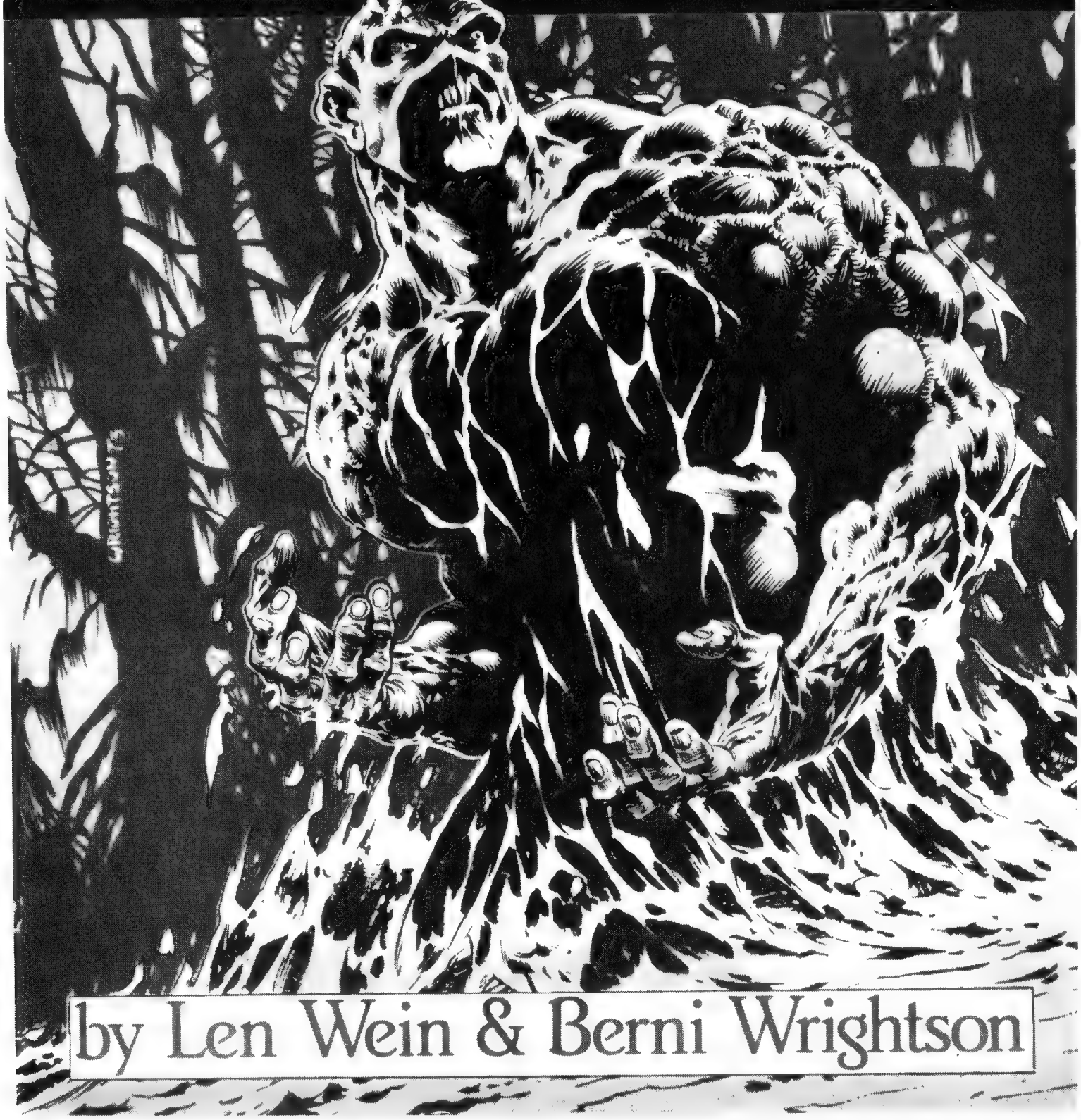

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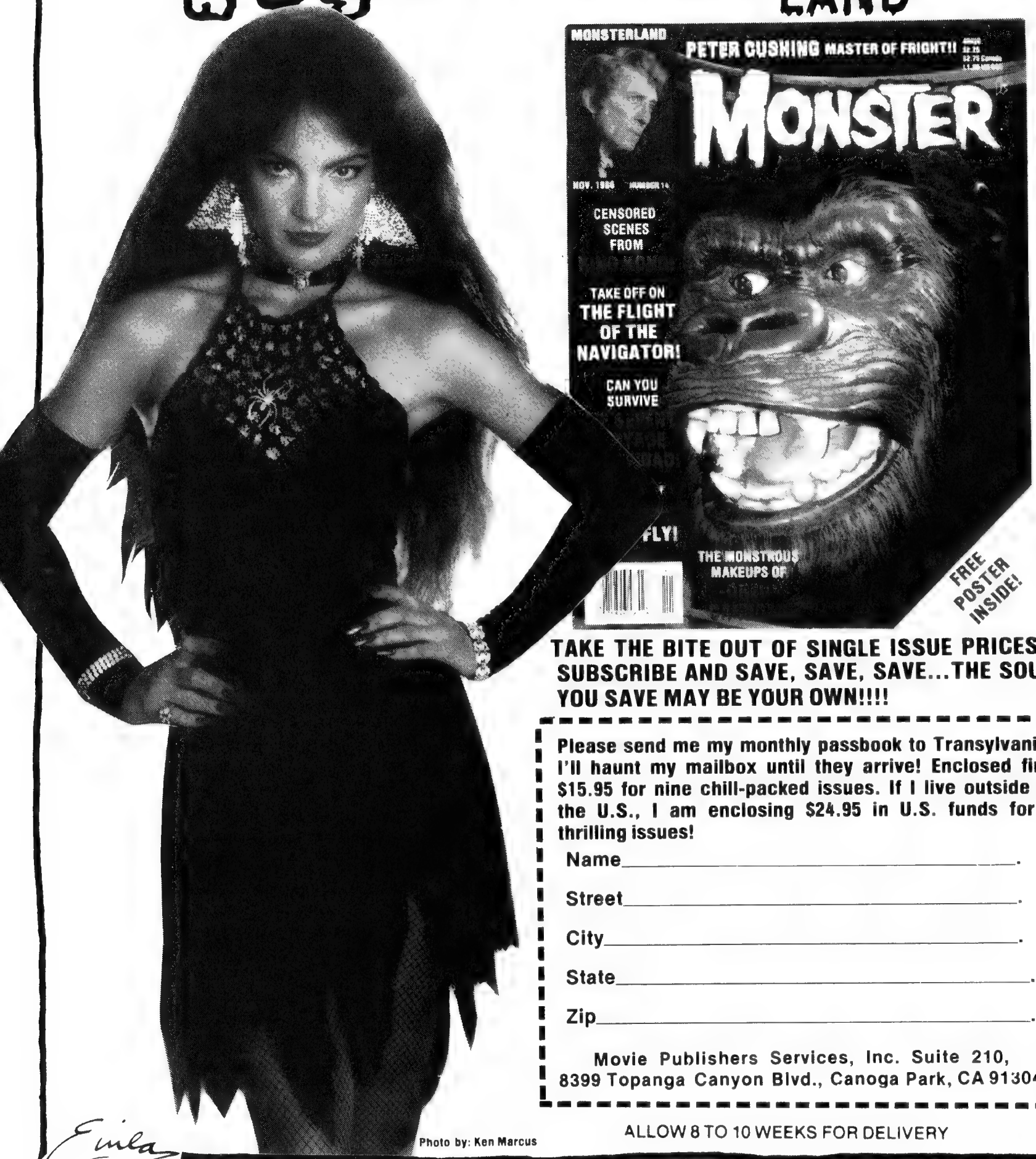

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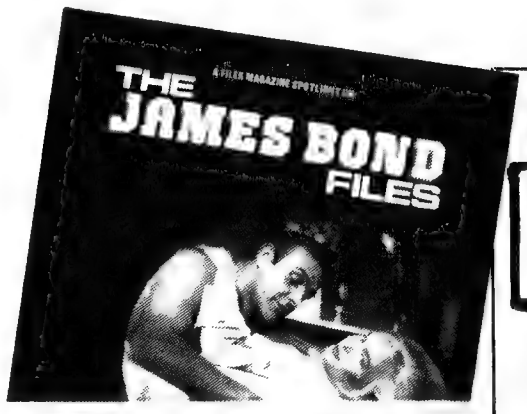

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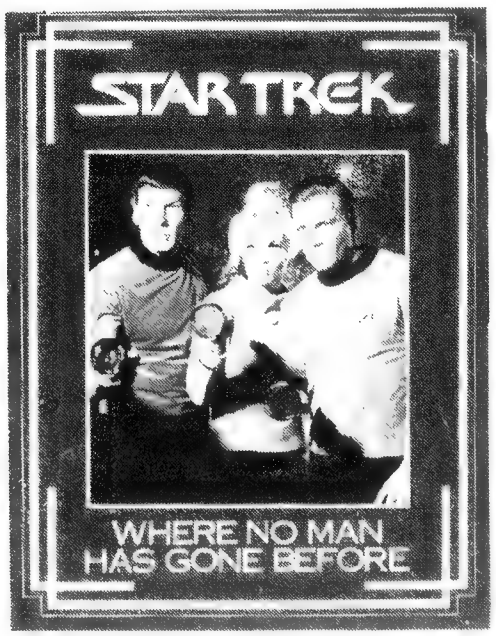

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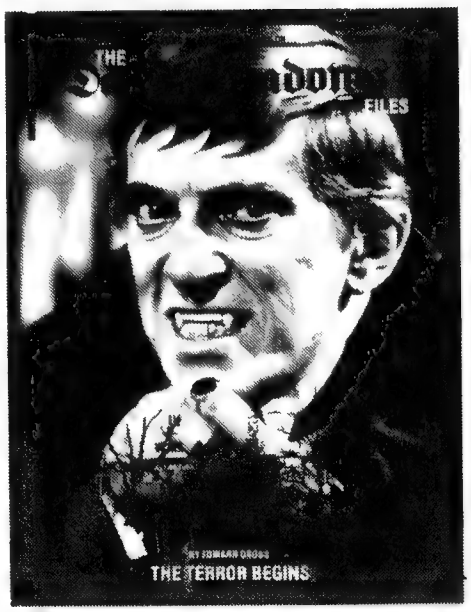

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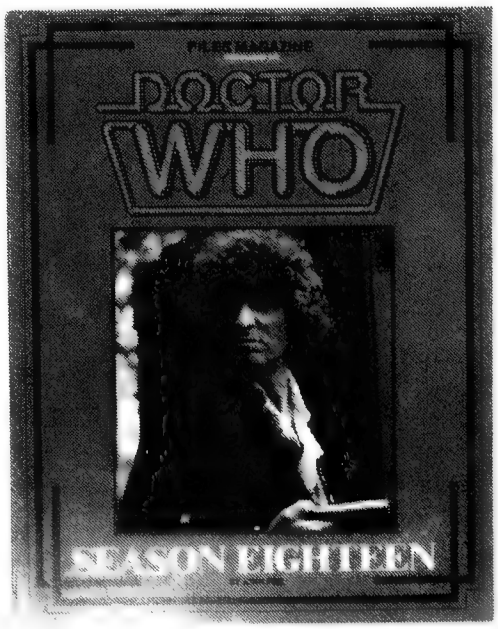

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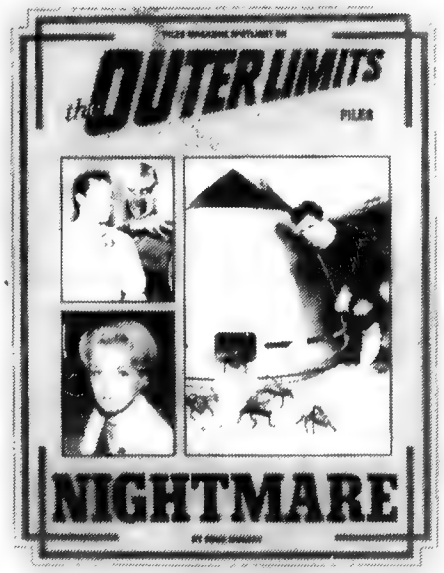

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